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"ALL RIGHT, PARD, I AM SAFE. PLAY OUT THE ROPE AND BE SURE AND
KEEP THAT END SECURE."

ARIZONA DICK'S WIPE-OUT;

OR,

Dare-Devil Dave's Death-Trap.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS,

CHAPTER I.

A HEINOUS CRIME.—DESERT SCENE.

YUMA was shocked.

Ay, more, the little city of Arizona was
thoroughly exasperated.

No more heinous crime had ever been

committed in all that section, and woe to Desert Dave—or Dare-Devil Dave as he was also named—and his band if the people could have laid hands upon them.

The crime was murder and the victims were the wife and daughter of a wealthy invalid of Nevada who was sojourning at Yuma for his health, occupying a cottage on the outskirts of the town.

Desert Dave had been heard of, and the *Sentinel* had recorded some of his doings in the interior, but it had not been for a moment thought that he would venture so far as to invade Yuma, or, indeed, any of the larger towns of the Territory. But, as it proved, they had not gauged him aright.

It was night when the deed was done—fitting time.

The cottage was broken into, robbery the intention; but, while that was going on the wife and daughter discovered the intruders.

At any rate, that was what was supposed, from what could be learned from the bereaved husband and father, and from the horrified servants. The victims had perhaps offered resistance or endeavored to give the alarm.

Both were slain, and ere the discovery was made the band had made good their escape.

As soon as the crime was made known the excitement was intense. Word was hurried along the river in both directions, with the hope of heading the ruffians off, but the discovery was soon made that they had struck out across the desert.

No sooner this, than it was guessed who the leader of the assassin band had been, a fact which did not tend to lessen the prevailing excitement or to reassure the people, and steps were taken at once toward his capture.

But, that was a thing more easily planned than accomplished. No man knew the deserts and death valleys better than did Desert Dave, and it did not take the pursuing posse long to discover that they were not equal to the task they had undertaken. They gave it up, when forced to do so, and returned to Yuma with their humiliating report.

The wealthy invalid's grief and desire for revenge seemed to give him renewal of strength. He vowed that the crime should be punished, if it cost him his last dollar.

In this the authorities and the people were anxious to lend all the aid possible, and certainly did, but something more had to be done.

At this time there was no keener detective in that country than a young man known as Arizona Dick, who knew almost every foot of the country west of the Missouri, except perhaps the death valleys.

He had performed some remarkable feats in his line, and, while not in Yuma at this time, he was sent for; and likewise another character—one Apache John, a noted desert scout, one who was accredited with knowing the plains and deserts as well as any man in the Territory.

These two reached Yuma the sixth day after the crime had been done, both on the same day, and were met upon their arrival.

They were known to each other.

Briefly the matter was laid before them, and they were asked to undertake the task of running down "the Desert Devil"—as the outlaw was characterized.

"Was there a motive for the crime?" asked the young detective.

"None—none," moaned the bereaved man. "It was pure, wanton depravity that led to it."

"You say they entered for the purpose of robbing?"

"Very evident, since they took everything of value they could carry off."

"Did they take anything of especial value? anything that might serve as a clue to their original intent?"

"No, no; there was nothing of the sort;

everything they took was of some value, of course, but they had no especial object in view, that is certain. It was simply plunder they were after and the murder was an after-thought."

Arizona Dick did not stop satisfied, with that, but pressed his questions further until he had covered the whole ground.

"I agree with you, sir," he said finally. "They had no especial cause against you, so far as can be seen. It was solely and only to raid the house in order to secure a rich haul. That seems evident."

"And by tarnation we'll give 'em enough of it afore we git done!" and old Apache John spoke with peculiar emphasis.

"Then you think you can run them down?"

"We'll make a big try fer it, anyhow, sir, an' ef we don't do it we can't no more'n fail."

"You must not fail!" the invalid cried. "Keep on, day and night, if necessary, until you accomplish your purpose. Would that I were able to go upon the trail myself!"

The detective and the scout promised to do their best, and set forth upon their mission—their hunt for the "Desert Devil"—the most daring desperado of that remote region.

The burning sun beat down upon the torrid sands with fierce heat.

It was a veritable Death Valley, for whitened bones were to be seen here and there in every direction, and some of these bones were those of human beings like themselves; a fact that caused the travelers to shiver with a feeling of dread which they were powerless to control.

There were, perhaps, a dozen of the little company, all told. With a white covered wagon with broad tires, drawn by four horses, they had essayed to cross the desert at a given point, but it would have been plain to the practiced eye that they had lost their way—the fact that they were at this spot was the proof of it. The men were hardy-looking and sun-bronzed, but they were sad of face and despairing of manner now.

Within the wagon were four or five women, panting from the effect of the heat, and dying of thirst. The men, for the most part, were walking on that side of the wagon where a little shade was cast. For miles back on the trail dead horses marked the way they had come, here and there, and the remaining animals were barely able to stand, yet they had been urged on and on in the vain hope that a spring might be discovered somewhere before the dreaded worst came upon man and beast alike. When one would drop in the harness, a rider would surrender his horse and put it in, going on foot himself.

Only two were now mounted, and their animals appeared as ready to drop as did those that pulled the precious freight of women and effects.

"Halt!"

The order was given by a bronzed, bearded man who had been riding ahead, and they all stopped, and as they did so, three of the harnessed horses went down in a heap, to rise no more, while the men who had been walking dropped beside them, utterly exhausted, and panting for breath.

"It's of no use," gasped the leader, swaying in his saddle. "We can never reach the hills; they are still forty miles away if one."

There was a general moan, and the bearded man turned away his face, shading his eyes with his hand and looking over the plain in every direction, hoping against hope that he might discover signs that would indicate water.

But, useless search, for already he had scanned the same horizon a hundred times.

Now, however, something arrested his gaze, and he straightened up in the saddle and looked more closely, while his breast

appeared to swell with hope suddenly awakened.

"I see something moving!" he cried. "What is it? Horsemen, as I live!"

Those who were able rose up and looked, and all agreed that the discoverer was right in his decision. Horsemen were approaching, not so far distant but that they could be made out as such, and hope was kindled in every breast.

If they could only draw their attention, and—if they had water!

On these hot, burning wastes, appearances are deceptive. The mountains, apparently only a mile distant, were really thirty miles away at the very least, while these horsemen, looking to be afar off, were really almost at hand; indeed, in a few minutes their faces began to grow distinct out of the white-hot desert glare.

There were seven of them, and as they came on at a gentle lope, as if not minding the heat that was sapping the life of the other travelers, the leader of the fatal caravan waved his hat and it was answered, and in a brief time longer the horsemen came up, some leaping from their saddles as soon as they arrived.

"What's the matter here?" demanded one, apparently the leader. "Where are you heading for?"

"Our guide deserted us, and we have lost our way," answered the head of the caravan. "We tried to reach Quartz Corral—fools that we were to trust our lives on these sands!"

"Well, you are corralled right here, and you'll never reach Quartz Corral. Fools, indeed, to think that you could cross the domain of Desert Dave! These sands are ready for you, and there is no escape—"

"My God! and are you—"

"Great heavens! our guide!" one of the women almost screamed, indicating another of the seven.

CHAPTER II.

JUMPING A GOLD MINE.

Forty miles to the west of this desert was a range of hills.

At this point the worst half of the desert had been crossed, and what lay beyond was slightly better in character.

On the sunrise side of these hills, or mountains, all was seared and barren, as if a mighty flood of living fire had at some period of the world's existence rolled that way.

And it was as if that flood, sweeping down through what was now this desert, had annihilated every living thing in its path, and so thoroughly that it could never again spring forth. Be that as it might, the hills were barren, and the valley was a death desert.

But the other side—ah!

One had only to reach the summit of the hills to see a vast change, a change so remarkable that one could hardly believe it true.

Perhaps it was only a mirage which, in a few minutes, would fade away and discover nothing but a stretch of barren waste as weary and dreary as this other which, in our imagination, we have just crossed.

But, no, for its perspective was too true to admit of a mistake.

A valley green with verdure lay before, a vista to charm the eye and a contrast to delight the surveyor.

On the immediate west side of the hills it began, as soon as the summit was crossed, and it was no sooner entered than there was a difference in the air. Indeed, had it not been so there could have been no change.

It was like a slice cut out of an entirely different world.

But, to particularize.

Afar off, as one gazed across this valley, its course plainly marked, ran a river, a sight most welcome to any pilgrim who approached from the desert.

On this river was Quartz Corral.

This place was the latest mining sensation of the great Southwest, at the time of which we write.

From North to South—though that was not precisely the course, all along the river, the main objective point was Quartz Corral, and even from across the deserts came hardy adventurers.

And all came with the one object in view—wealth, though with vastly different intentions regarding their means of acquiring it.

The camp was like others of its kind.

It was such a place as Deadwood, to the far North, had been before it, and as the Creede of the days since its time.

There were, all told, maybe two thousand population, men and women, of every sort and kind and every degree of social rating to be known or mentioned.

And then, too, it was a place where day-time was a rather monotonous period, usually, but where night was rendered day, in point of wakefulness and excitement, almost from the time the sun set till it rose again.

Let the reader come with us to this place.

A party of horsemen, weary and travel-stained, drew up in front of the principal hotel, the Primrose.

For the most part they were rough-appearing fellows, not one but had several weeks' growth of beard upon his face, and by their dress it would have been hard to determine just what they were.

"Hillo?" the leader called out.

Some fellows on the piazza passed the word along to the landlord of the hotel, and he presented himself forthwith.

"That's my name, boys," he greeted. "What's wanted?"

"That depends, landlord. Ef this here is Quartz Corral, then we have come to stay awhile."

"You ar' in the right town, neighbors."

"And is there room at your feed-trough for about this number of hungry hoosiers?"

"Plenty of room, boys."

"Then we're to home," speaking to his companions. "Light off, and we'll get a feed the first thing and talk business later. Has Peter Wagner died, landlord?"

"Yes, weeks ago. You knowed him?"

"Well, some, seein' that I'm his brother."

"The deuce you say! Then you own the Jewel Mine?"

"That's about the essence of a dockymment I hold, anyhow."

"Well, it's lucky you have showed up, fer that claim has been jumped half a dozen times, or tried ter be, since Pete's light went out."

"That so?"

"Yes."

"But, ther jumpin' didn't hold, eh?"

"Not worth a cent. You see, Pete was liked, and we meant to see that his brother got what belonged to him."

"Thousand times 'bliged to ye. These hyer's my boys, three on 'em, anyhow, and t'other three is chums who chipped in to come along. We are goin' to tackle that mine fer fair."

"You needn't work it a day, if you don't want to."

"How is that?"

"You can sell. Been plenty of moneyed men to look at it, and it won't go a-beggin' fer a buyer."

"Well, we'll see about that. But, feed first, an' then we'll prove up an' take possession. Don't opine there will be any objection to that, hey?"

"Not if your claim is good."

"Then we are all right."

They bunched their horses around a post and went in, but there was little about them to proclaim them hoosiers as they had declared.

Their weapons were slung about their persons in the true Southwestern style, and their speech and stride savored of the same,

but there was no one to dispute with them, seeing that they came as strangers.

When they had taken their fill at the table, they topped off with a drink and lighted cigars.

"What about them cayuses, Cap Wagner?" one of the seven then asked.

The leader had been addressed as Wagner throughout.

"They stand in need of a fodder, of course," the leader responded. "Where shall we put 'em, landlord?"

Mine host of the Primrose, having seen the color of the money these fellows were heeled with, and finding that it was straight and forthcoming, gladly lent his aid again.

The horses having been led away, the new-comers set forth to find the city marshal, being directed to his office.

The one called Cap Wagner knocked loudly on the door with the butt of a gun, and the door swinging open under the effect of the blows, the marshal was revealed, with the "drop" on the doorway. That is to say, he had the entrance covered with a Winchester.

These were days when it behooved a man to be prepared for any emergency, and the Marshal of Quartz Corral was generally ready.

"Thunderashun!" ejaculated the caller.

"What's wanted?" demanded the marshal.

"Nothin' of that kind, anyhow," was the rejoinder, and the visitor thrust his gun into its holster.

"Well, I didn't know," said the marshal, lowering his rifle. "I know the knock of a gun when I hear it, and I didn't know but what you had called on business. I am here for business."

"Should say you was," the caller assented. "And we have come on business, too, but not that kind. Jest look at these here papers, will ye?"

He drew some letters from his pocket and tossed them down upon the marshal's desk.

"All right, boys; take a seat on the bench."

He indicated a bench that ran along the wall opposite his desk, and laid his rifle across the desk facing them as they sat down.

Then he looked at the letters.

"Pete Wagner's brother?" he cried. "You are the man he sent for, then? I am the one who wrote that last letter to you."

"Glad ter know ye," said the new-comer, getting up and offering his hand. "I s'pose you got mine. But, no matter; I had letters from Pete an' he had letters from us at home, an' here I be!"

"Yes, but in your letter you said you would sell out and bring your family, as he desired."

"That's straight; but, you see, the wimmin backed out when it came to the nip, so we had to come alone. They wouldn't let go the old place, and we ar' pledged to return to 'em inside of a year."

"Hal! then you will sell out?"

"Most likely, but we're not in a rush about that. What we want first is possession."

"And that you shall have immediately. You have brought all the proof that could be asked, and there is nothing to keep you out of it. We'll go and see the mine. Hope you haven't spoke about selling it yet, for I would like to have a chance at it myself for some friends of mine."

There was much talk, but the result of it all was that the claimants were installed in possession of the mine.

CHAPTER III.

DARING UNTO DEATH.

CLEARLY, but faintly upon the morning air a cry was borne to the two men upon the dizzy height.

They drew rein instantly, looking into

each other's face in an inquiring way, and while they stood thus the cry was repeated. There was no mistaking it this time; it demanded attention.

"What aire et, pard?" queried the elder of the two horsemen.

"A man in distress, that is certain," answered the younger. "Our duty is plain, Apache John, be he saint or devil."

"I kalkylate et aire, lad. We'll stop right hyer till we hev found out who an' what he is, anyhow. But, whar in all mystery kin he be? Thar ain't footin' hyer fer a goat, 'cept the trail."

"And he isn't in sight anywhere. Must be around yonder bend."

"So I sh'u'd kalkylate."

They moved forward, but on reaching the point in question no person was to be seen there.

"Help! Help!"

To their ears again came the cry, and now it seemed to come from a direction to the rear of their present position. They looked that way, wonderment pictured upon their faces.

"Et beats thunder," ejaculated the elder.

"It is a puzzle, sure enough. But let's answer the cry. Halloo-oo!"

Clear as a bugle's note rung out the call, and the steep mountain walls and rugged crags took it up and flung it this way and that, carrying it on and on, until it was lost in faintest echo.

Ere it had died away, however, came again the appealing cry they had heard at first.

"It is over the ledge," the younger man decided.

"Et ain't nowhar else, Pard Richard," the other agreed.

They turned on the narrow ledge trail, and rode back again to the point where they had first stopped.

The imagination could not paint a scene more wild or rugged. The two horsemen, who had traveled many a mountain trail, had never beheld its equal.

A winding trail had come suddenly out upon what seemed to be the abrupt ending of the mountain range itself, showing a sheer descent of thousands of feet to the plains below.

On the other hand the walls of rock rose still higher, but the height was as nothing when compared with the depth. Their panting horses spoke the extreme rarity of the atmosphere, for their gait had not exceeded a walk at any time that morning; and, the men's own breathing was short.

The younger of the travelers hallooed yet again, and the response came back from the fearful depths.

Both now dismounted and cautiously bent over the frightful ledge.

As they did so, both uttered an exclamation.

There, on a placard that was tacked upon a bit of board held by a crevice in the rock, was this wording:

"ARIZONA DICK'S DOOM."

"If you want his bones, go down and get them. This is the fate of an accursed spy."

"By COMMITTEE."

The two travelers looked at each other questioningly, before either spoke; a question in silence, yet which both apparently understood although neither could answer it.

"He has been pitched over hyer," said the elder.

"If so, he would be a jelly of flesh down there in the valley."

"An' yet he talks! Dicky, what in the name of wonders do ye make out of et, anyhow? What does et mean?"

Both had taken a careful look, but nothing in the shape of human form was to be seen anywhere, yet while they looked the same cry again reached their ears.

The face of the young man took on a grim expression.

"There is a human down here somewhere, Apache John," he declared, "and we must see who it is. Bring your lariat and mine."

"What do you mean ter do, Pard Richard?"

"Go down."

"By glory! you shell do nothin' of ther kind—"

But, he stopped. The grim look on the face of the younger man relaxed into a smile scarcely less grim, and it was evident that he was the master. The other turned to get the lariats.

"Et's dangerous," he said, when he brought them. "I'm only one man to hold ye, boy, and ef the rope should break—Great sands! only think of et."

"It is not to be thought of, Apache John. I trust you, and I know you will do your part."

"You never knowed me to fail yet, pardner."

"That's true."

While speaking, the younger man was making one end of one of the lariats secure around his body.

That done to his satisfaction, he tied the two ropes together, and when he had run them out free he handed the other end to the elder man and bade him secure it to both the horses!

"Never thort of that," cried his partner. "Guess et will lbe all right, 'bout holdin' ye."

"I shall take the risk, anyhow. But, hearken, now!"

He shouted to the one unseen.

The response came back the same as before, and whoever the man was he was hid from view by a projecting ledge of rock.

"Who and what are you?" was inquired.

"My name is Tom Stannard," came back the answer. "I am suspended here in a horrible situation. In the name of God, I implore you to rescue me if in your power. I am helpless."

"We'll try it. How far down are you?"

"Maybe twenty feet below the ledge that hides me from your sight."

"All right; keep a good heart and I'll show you my legs dangling in the air in a few minutes."

Silence, then.

The younger man having inspected every inch of the rope to which he was about to trust his life, offered his hand to his companion.

"Well, Apache John," he said, with feeling, "this may mean a parting for us for all time, so give me your hand. If I should fall, never mind looking for the fragments, but push on."

"Good glory! boy, ye almost break my heart speakin' like that, even if et is as dried an' withered as a chuck o' jerked meat. But, you'll be safe ef the lariat holds, an' I think et will. I'll never let go, ef it cuts my hand off; you kin rely on that."

They shook hands fervently, and turned from each other's face.

The elder of the pair took a turn with the rope around a knob of rock near at hand, and gave word that he was ready.

Without the slightest hesitation, the other slipped over the awful ledge, and, aiding himself with his hands, went gradually down and down toward the jutting ledge below.

This reached, he passed over it with care, leaving the rope in as smooth a spot as possible, and from there looking down he saw a sight that chilled his heart.

Just below, suspended from a point of rock that looked like the nose of a blacksmith's anvil, swinging in what had the appearance of a rough rope basket, was a man.

He was not a bad-looking fellow, with black hair and mustache, but he was as

white as death itself, and his face was the picture of very horror, yet upon which was just the faintest expression of new-born hope. Never was mortal in a more terrible and dangerous plight.

The rescuer went on down and down, until he came to the projecting horn of rock, which fortunately, was right in his course of descent, and this he straddled and there stopped.

Instantly came a shout from above.

Feeling the slack rope, the other traveler was instantly filled with alarm.

"All right, pard!" the younger called out. "I am safe; play out the rope and be sure to keep that end secure!"

"All right!" came back the glad response, and the rope came down, the little that remained of it, for it had already nearly reached its length.

The daring young man removed it from his body, then, and making a running noose, balanced himself well and made a throw with it to secure the man suspended below.

The first cast was not successful, nor the second, but the third settled over the man's shoulders and well down toward his elbows.

When pulled, it took secure hold, and seemed not likely to slip.

"Does it feel secure?" the rescuer asked.

"Yes; you can't do it any better," was the answer.

"Then shut your eyes and say a prayer!"

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE RISK OF HIS LIFE.

THAT man is a true hero who will risk his own life to save another's.

Then this man was a true hero, for he had taken a most desperate risk.

It required a cool head and nerves of steel to do what he had already done, and these the young man certainly had, to a marked degree.

With his last words to the prisoner of the basket, the rescuer straightened up, made himself as secure as possible, and then called out:

"Apache John?"

"Right hyer, pard," came back.

"Pull up till you hear me say stop, then hold right there."

"All right, pardner; et shall be done jest as you direck. I'm as cool as the 'tarnel hills, by glory!"

The rope tightened, then strained, and the prisoner was lifted gradually, the knotted basket with him, the looped lariat having caught around a portion of that as well.

As the weight came upon the lariat, the noose by which the basket had hung slipped off the rock, and now this man's life depended solely and only upon the slender rope and the man who had control of it above. The eyes of the prisoner were shut, and his lips moved.

Up, up, he was drawn, very slowly indeed but steadily, till he came abreast with his rescuer on the rock projection, when a grip as of steel was laid upon the basket and it was drawn to the rocky resting-place.

"Stop!"

Clear as a horn the command rung out.

"Stop et'ar, pardner!" the response, and the upward motion ceased.

"Hold steady!"

"You bet!"

"Now, sir, to the cutting of your bonds," said the rescuer to the prisoner, "and the success of your rescue will then depend on yourself. Keep your position in the net unchanged, but help yourself over that ledge just above."

"I'll do it, never fear, if I have the strength. God bless you for the risk you have taken for me. I'll never forget this act."

"Don't mention it now; we'll talk later."

The rescuer freed the other's hands, made

a knot in the two ropes—that of the basket and the lariat, for additional security, and the prisoner took hold of the lariat with as firm a grip as possible.

Then the word was given to draw up.

Immediately began again the ascent; the man in the basket reached the over-hanging ledge and helped himself over it; then he was lost to view.

The man on the horn of rock sat as still as a statue, his head steady and his jaws firmly set, awaiting the result of the terrible task his older partner had in hand, and on which a life depended.

Some minutes passed.

"All right, pardner!" came then the welcome news. "He's as safe as ary dead Apache, you bet! Now et's your turn."

"That's good, Apache John. Now, examine every inch of that rope, and then let it down to me. You have my life in your keeping, old pard."

"An' you kin bet your guns that et is in good hands. Nothin' kin happen to ye, Richard, boy, unless this hyer rope parts, an' I kalkylate et has stood the test good enough."

Presently the rope came dangling over the edge, and the man below soon had it secured around his body as before.

He gave the word then and was carried upward!

"Boy, I must hug ye," cried the older man as soon as the younger was once more safe on the ledge trail. "Ef my hair ain't white et ain't 'cause my heart ain't been standin' still wi' fear fer ye."

He caught his pard to his breast and embraced him fondly.

The face of the elder was as white as chalk, and his forehead was dripping with perspiration.

The younger responded in like manner, and that done, they turned their attention to the man whom they had rescued from so terrible a living death, and who was still confined in the network.

"Darn me ef ye ain't tied in ther blamed thing!" exclaimed Apache John.

"Yes, they did that so that I could not get out and dash myself to the depths below."

"The infernal hounds! But, who was they?"

"Desert Dave and his band."

"Desert Dave!" and the two travelers exchanged meaning glances on hearing this; then the elder of the pair exclaimed;

"Ther cussed hyenas! Ef we don't make it hot fer 'em fer this, et will be 'cause we have forgot how to foller a trail, that's all; hey, Pard Arizona?"

"I agree with you, Apache John. By the way, stranger, you said your name is Tom Stannard, I believe."

They were freeing him as they talked.

"Yes."

"Then this placard cannot refer to you. It must mean that Arizona Dick has been hurled from this trail to the plains below."

"On the contrary it refers to me, sir. I was met by these outlaws, taken for Arizona Dick, and that was the fate to which they consigned me. Thank God for this rescue, and for the privilege of stretching my legs once more!"

"You ar' hearty welcome to et, I'm sure," declared Apache John.

They had freed him entirely and assisted him to get upon his feet. At first he was scarcely able to stand without assistance.

The placard had been removed from its place just over the edge of the ledge, and the younger of the two travelers now held it in his hand, looking at it as if trying to study something out of it.

"Do you know which of the band wrote this?" he asked of the rescued man.

"I do not, but I guess it must have been Desert Dave himself. He is a man of some education."

"Very likely you are right. It reveals the fact that the one who did it is not by

any means illiterate. Which way were these outlaws going?"

"North."

Apache John and his younger partner exchanged another look, and the former nodded his head in an emphatic manner.

"How came they to take you for Arizona Dick?" asked the younger.

"One of the band claimed to have seen Arizona Dick, and swore that I was the man. But, there was more than that behind it."

"What more?"

"Desert Dave is my mortal foe, and he knew me at sight, and I him. Only for the fact that they got the drop on me I would have killed him, even had my life paid the forfeit the next moment."

"And recognizing you, he consigned you to this horrible fate?"

"Yes."

"He was less than human. Better to have hurled you from the cliff, and made an end of you at once."

"That was too tame for Desert Dave. He wanted to torture me, and after long thought this was the plan he and his band fixed upon; they even risked their lives to carry it out."

"They are very devils!"

"Most as bad as Apaches, I swear!"

It was evident that, to the mind of Apache John, nothing evil could quite approach the ferocity of the Apache.

"How long had you been suspended there?" asked he called Richard, or Dick.

"Since late yesterday afternoon."

"The wonder is that you stood it as well as you did."

"I slept as much as possible through the night, reserving all my strength for daylight."

"And what then, had we not come along?"

"I would have stood it as long as possible, and then, with no hope left, it was my intention to cut short my suffering by biting the rope until it would part and let me fall."

"Too awful to think about! But, Apache John, give him something to eat and drink, out of our supply, and we will put him on my horse and push on. His cause and ours are one, evidently, and in company we will hunt this inhuman fiend to his doom."

"Who, then, are you?" asked the rescued man.

"Well, it happens that I am Arizona Dick, and these well-termed Devils shall feel the weight of my hand before I give up their trail."

CHAPTER V.

INTO A HIDDEN DEATH-TRAP.

STANNARD stared at Arizona Dick in amazement.

His looks showed that he had heard of him before, and his surprise was that he should meet him here.

"Can it be possible," he ejaculated, "that I have been rescued by the very man I was accused of being? This is passing strange, Arizona Dick! I am glad it has happened so."

"And I'm glad of the same thing," declared Dick. "They took you for me, and I see the love they have for me. I will be prepared to meet them half-way in a showing of affection. But, you say it was not all owing to a mistake that you were so severely dealt with."

"Not by any means. Desert Dave recognized in me his most relentless foe, and sought to consign me to a horrible fate. But, why are you on the trail of these fellows?"

"For a crime committed at Yuma a month ago."

"That's a good while."

"I have been on their trail ever since, with this man as my pard and guide. If there is a foot of Arizona that Apache John does not know, no other white man knows

it. But, Desert Dave, called the Arizona Devil, is giving us a long, hard hunt."

"Yet you are close upon him now."

"We have been close upon him before, but in some way he has thus far managed to slip through our fingers."

"You did not expect to encounter and overcome him and his band, did you, and you only two against seven?"

"Are there seven of them?"

"Yes."

"That is just what we did expect to do, an' what we do expect to do, too, even if thar should be a dozen of 'em," declared Apache John, emphatically. "We ar' on ther trail fer the red, an' we expect ter git some."

"By the way, what is the crime for which you are hunting down this outlaw?"

"Murder and robbery."

"His old line."

"He broke into the cottage of a wealthy sojourner at Yuma, murdered his wife and daughter, robbed the house of everything in the way of money and light valuables, and was off into the desert before the authorities could get hold of him."

"Good heavens! It is for a similar crime that I am on his track!"

"He killed some one dear to you?"

"My wife."

"Then you have good reason to hate him, and no doubt he knew he had good cause to fear you."

"You are right, when you say that, right in both senses. It must be his life or mine, sooner or later. You have been employed by the wealthy man you speak of, I take it?"

"Yes."

"Then it will be a rivalry between us to see which will get the first whack at him."

"And it may fall to you, if it is your intention to shoot him at sight, as you have mentioned. I hope you will forego that; let us all work together to take him prisoner."

"And what then?"

"Back to Yuma with him, with all haste."

"And give that other man his revenge, while mine goes unsated?"

"Not so; his revenge and yours will be one, and it will be the same satisfaction to both."

"No, no; it could never be! Nothing but a bullet from my own weapon, or a knife in my own hand, can ever give me satisfaction against that fiend. I fear we can never agree on any line."

"We can at any rate hunt him down together. What if we had left you hanging down there in your rope-basket?"

The rescued man bowed his head.

"Arizona Dick, I am in no position to dictate terms," he said humbly. "I beg your pardon. I owe my life to you, and you have only to command me now."

"I'm glad to hear you talk that way, Tom Stannard. Your revenge shall be complete, once we have accomplished our object—his capture."

"Then let us be on his trail."

"Can you mount my horse?"

"With help. But, then you will have to walk!"

"I am better able to walk than you, so do not mention that. Give me your foot."

With Arizona Dick's help, Stannard was placed on Dick's horse, and Apache John mounting, they moved forward, having first cast the rope basket and the placard over the cliff.

The strength of the rescued man was returning, under exercise and the food and drink he had taken.

He told his story in detail as they rode along.

The dangerous portion of the trail had been passed, and from that point was a gradual descent, zigzag and winding, between towering walls on either hand.

Apache John was in the lead, and, whether it was noticed or not, was looking from side

to side as with the eyes of an eagle, as if scenting danger or as though uncertain of the way.

There was but the one way, however.

No other course had been presented to them, and they had followed this one straight on.

Presently the old guide stopped, and half turning in the saddle, said:

"Pard Richard, somethin' is wrong hyer."

"What is it, Apache John?"

"I don't know."

"Well, what does it seem to be, then? Surely, you are too old a hand to get nervous over nothing."

"Do I look narvous, think ye? Wull, I ain't, not a bit! I bet I ked send a bullet as straight to its mark as you. But, somethin' is on my mind that all ain't as et should be."

Arizona Dick had been looking, too, while they exchanged these remarks.

There was nothing to be seen save the wild, rugged rock, and the stretch of blue sky that spanned above the top of the narrow gulch.

Suddenly, however, the reports of rifles rung out, almost in unison, and with groans that were almost human the two horses sunk to the ground, their riders with them!

Apache John and the rescued stranger barely escaped being pinned fast by the animals as they fell.

Arizona Dick had his guns in hand instantly.

He knew the shots had come from close at hand, on the right of the gulch, but not a man was to be seen, and only the smoke was visible.

This was rising slowly skyward, and there was not another sight or sound besides to prove that what had happened was real and not a dream. That is, save the dying horses.

Arizona Dick and Tom Stannard stood exposed to view.

Not so, however, the old scout, for in falling he had remained behind the body of his dying horse.

"Down, boy!" he cried to Dick.

"Too late," a voice rung out. "Drop your weapons and surrender, or you will share the fate of your horses!"

"You mean to show us no quarter?"

"Not the ghost of it. Drop your guns while I count three. One, two—"

Arizona Dick threw down his revolvers and put up his hands, the man he had rescued doing the same.

"It's no use, this deal, John," spoke Dick.

"They have got us in a death-trap." "Looks like et, pardner, sure enough. Guess we'll have ter ante up or pass, seein' thar ain't no way out of et."

"You want to be quick about it, then," rung out the voice of the man unseen. "Get up from there and hold up your hands, or our bullets will cut down your pards."

"Et goes ag'in' the grain, by glory!" the scout growled, as he got up, holding his hands in plain sight, without weapons; "but ef I must I s'pose I must, an' thar is an end on't."

"Now, boys, secure them."

Immediately there was a scramble, half a dozen forms appeared over what looked to be a knife-blade sliver of rock, before unnoticed, and the three prisoners were quickly surrounded.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT WAS THEIR FATE?

"DESERT DAVE!"

The exclamation fell from the lips of Tom Stannard.

"The Desert Devil, at your service!" responded a man who had been the last to show his face over the rock splinter.

There was a wicked smile upon his hardened visage, and he glared at his prisoners like one who knew that his triumph over a foe was certain and his own safety assured.

The prisoners were held, each by two men.

and the Desert Devil straddled leisurely over the sliver of rock and came to where they stood.

"Well, Arizona Dick," he greeted, "your trail has come to an end."

He addressed Dick the genuine.

"It looks that way," Dick carelessly answered.

"Yes, and it is the fact. I had grown tired of your attention to me, and so laid this little trap for you and you fell into it."

"It was a clever one, Devil Dave. I am ready to acknowledge a superior bit of strategy in either friend or foe. But, now that you have got us, what are you going to do with us?"

"Maybe hurl you from the high cliff trail."

"That will certainly do the business for us, and if you take my advice you will dispose of us in a no less certain manner."

"Why?"

"Because, if we escape it will only be to take up the trail again with more determination than ever, if possible."

"Ha, ha, ha! Why, you talk as cool as ice about it. But, then, I would not expect Arizona Dick to fall upon his knees and cringe and whine and beg for mercy. I hate a coward!"

"You will never hate me for that reason."

"But, I hate you as heartily for another, and that is, because you are an accursed spy."

"And because you are an utterly detestable outlaw, one whose hand is red with the blood of the innocent victims of your ferocity, dog that you are—hyena in the form of a human being!"

The face of the outlaw grew dark, and he half-raised the revolver he had in hand.

But, he checked the inclination to drop the detective in his tracks.

"No, I'll give you a worse fate than that," he grated. "A worse fate than hurling you from the high cliff, too. I'll imprison you alive, you and your worthy companions, and let thirst and hunger do their work with you!"

"That is befitting your nature; you have been well named the Devil of the Desert. If you had one spark of humanity in your breast you would end the matter at once. Since it means death to us, what good will it do you to prolong it? We ask no quarter, but we ought to be shown as much mercy as our beasts."

"Ha, ha, ha! That is the good it will do me, curse you! To hear you ask a request which is in my power to grant, yet which I deny you, is my highest pleasure in connection with your fate. To know that you are dying by inches, of hunger and thirst, will make my sleep the sweeter. This will be your punishment for the hard names you have called me."

"Would that I could apply worse to you, you monster!" was the emphatic retort of the undaunted young detective-avenger.

"Call him a cursed Apache!" cried Apache John.

"A human scourge and murderer of helpless women!" added Tom Stannard, vehemently.

"Pile it on!" the outlaw invited, with a grim smile. "You have doubly sealed the fate I had in mind for you."

"Better let us slit their necks," suggested one of his men.

"No; that would be no satisfaction at all."

"Then burn them alive."

"No, no; too tame! That would be over and done with in a little while, and there would be the end of it. I want them to have plenty of time to feel the hatred of Desert Dave. Men have dubbed me the Arizona Devil; I'll do my part to honor the name."

"But, durn et, is it possible that I was

mistaken 'bout Arizona Dick?" one of his men demanded.

"Yes, you were, as I knew well enough," answered the leader.

"Then why didn't you tell us?"

"Wanted the hatred of every man of you against him, so that I could give him the fate he merited."

"And you let us risk our lives over that cliff to carry on your personal revenge, hey?" cried another. "That wasn't no fair. Desert Dave, say what 'ou please to ther contrary."

"Who is chief of this band you or I?" the outlaw demanded.

"You ar', Dave," from another.

"Then don't question my doings like this, I warn you! For your service, I now place in your hands Arizona Dick the real."

"Hooray! We'll roast ther cussed spy alive, an' dance around his burnin' an' hear him howl! That's ther way ter serve sech as him, you bet!"

"Most as bad as cussed Apaches, I swear," grated Apache John. "But, do yer worst, blast ye! This is your chance, an' if ye make a mess of it, look out."

"Enough," said Desert Dave, sternly. "Hold them as you have them, boys, an arm each, and look out for tricks. This, Arizona Dick, is the end of your earthly career of usefulness. I expected you this way, and promising my boys a welcome surprise, held them in ambush."

Seeing that his prisoners were safe, the chief of the band walked forward along the gulch—so to call it, past the dead horses, and on until he came to a spot where a narrower way branched off.

Into this he turned, and his men followed with their prisoners.

Ere long they came to an abrupt ending of the way, where a wall blocked further progress.

"Here, or a couple of rods from the end, the chief stopped, motioning his men to do the same, and pointing to the ending of the way, said:

"Prisoners, place yourselves against yonder wall."

"To be shot?" demanded Arizona Dick.

"Do you think I would give you a fate so simple? No; I have something worse in store for you than that."

"Well, there is no choice, I suppose."

"Unless you want us to fill your skin with bullet-holes to convince you that we mean business. That we will do, yet not a shot to take your life, unless you take your places as I order."

Desert Dave motioned with his revolver, and having no choice, the prisoners obeyed.

With half a score of revolvers aimed at them—some of the outlaws having two in hand, what else could they do?

They took their places at the end of the blind gulch, as directed, and Desert Dave and his men stepped a few paces back, in a body, putting up their guns.

None of the entrapped three could guess what was coming.

Arizona Dick, cool as he was, could not understand what this meant nor apprehend what was to follow.

It was the same with Apache John and the man whom they had rescued. Stir up their ideas as they would, they could get no satisfactory thought to cover this—in fact, no idea whatever.

"Now, hear what I have to say to you," spoke the Arizona Devil, with a tone of exultation. "You are helpless in my power, and I mean to consign you to a fate far worse than death by bullets, or even by fire at the stake. You cannot guess what it is to be."

They made no response.

"Yet, you know, full well, from what I have said," the outlaw chief went on. "You are doomed to die of thirst and hunger, where no aid can come to you, and where escape is out of the question. Do you believe

what I tell you now—that it is utterly impossible for you to walk from where you stand to this point? You have gone over ground that will never know your footfalls again."

Arizona Dick's wonderment increased, and he looked at his pard.

Apache John's eyes were open to their widest, and he was looking at the rock floor of the narrow gulch.

"If you do not believe it, try it," the Desert Devil invited. "You have taken steps which you can never retrace. Your doom is sealed. You, Apache John, I have feared, if it can be said that Desert Dave ever feared any man; but I fear you no longer. You, Arizona Dick, have the name of being a relentless bloodhound when once you have taken a trail, and I believe it is true; but you have run to the end of your last trail now. And you, Tom Stannard, since you were determined to run me down, I send you to another fate no less horrible than that other."

With a wave of his hand the outlaw chief motioned his men back further, and when they had taken a couple of steps backward, in a body, the three men at the end of the narrow passage felt the support going from under their feet!

A look of dismay came into each face. It was so unexpected, so entirely unthought of, that this was no wonder. The very ground was sinking beneath their weight and they were thrown backward against the wall of rock, struggling in vain to regain their upright posture!

They then realized that the outlaw had spoken truly—that they had passed over ground which they would never cross again. It was impossible for them to get away from the wall at their backs, and in their ears rung the taunting laughter of their merciless captors—now their murderers.

"What did I tell you?" demanded the Desert Devil. "Do you think you can get here if you try? But, you are trying as hard as you can; ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" joined in his men. "What d'ye think of et, dang ye? Serves ye jest right, not lettin' free men do as they darn please in a free kentry. You will not be heard from again."

"I wish I had a gun in nand this instant!" cried Arizona Dick.

"It wouldn't do you any good," retorted Dave. "I would pick it out of your grasp before you could crook your finger."

"I would take the chances of your doing it, and if you missed you would feel a bullet searching for your heartstrings the same moment. Remember, I'm on your death-trail if I escape."

"Ha! ha! ha! You'll never escape; you are going now to your death. See, you move faster; hold fast if you can! Going, going, gone!"

The tilting rock moved more rapidly as the outlaw spoke, and the three men made further effort to save themselves, but it was useless, and the next moment they slipped off and disappeared into a hole that yawned to swallow them.

Down they went, the three together, and, had the hole been deep enough, it must have been to their instant death.

Then, relieved of their weight, the tilting rock began to rise again to its place. The light streamed into the place in the interim, and the outlaws beheld their victims in a heap at the bottom of the hole beneath.

"And there you are!" Desert Dave added, exultingly. "See the lid of this rat-trap made by nature closes over you, and there is no come back!"

Again he and his men laughed loudly over the misery of their foes.

Arizona Dick scrambled to his feet.

"God help you, if ever I do escape out of here!" he cried fiercely. "Then I'll take up the trail for a personal vengeance, Desert

Dave, and it were better for you that you had never been born."

"You will need His help to get out, I can assure you of that," was the grim rejoinder.

"And may He grant it!"

The rock moved faster, as it righted itself, and while the outlaws laughed again in chorus it fell to its place with a thud.

It having dropped to its place, Desert Dave and another rolled a boulder on top where it could couple with a notch in the side-wall of the blind rock alley, and that having been done, they could walk upon the turning slab without danger of its tipping.

How the desperadoes had come to know of the existence of such a place let us not pause to question; they did know of it, and now had made use of it to dispose of their dangerous enemies. They whooped in chorus, and with a last look at the living tomb of their victims, and loud-mouthed taunts and insults hurled in their direction, turned away from the scene of their diabolical crime.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET OF A SIGNAL.

"WHO! What means this, boys?"

The little company of horse men came to a stop at once.

"What means what, sheriff?" demanded another, of the first speaker quoted.

The captain of the *posse* pointed with his short quirt to the base of the gigantic cliff.

There was a stick, or piece of board, from which a bit of white paper fluttered, and a pace or two distant was a bunch of knotted rope.

"Hello! sure enough, what does it mean?" spoke yet a third. "Wait; I'll slip off and see about it, Commodore." And he suited action to the words, leaping lightly to the ground.

"A casket, as I live!" he cried, picking up the bunch of rope, that being nearest. "And a halter and a noose to it! What the deuce do you make out of it?"

"Give me the paper," said the captain.

The dismounted man stepped to this and picked it up, handing it to the first speaker, from whose lips immediately fell an exclamation.

"What is it, Commodore?"

"Here is the name of Arizona Dick—"

"Arizona Dick! Is it possible? Read it out, sheriff, read it out!"

"Here is the wording of it, boys:

"ARIZONA DICK'S DOOM—"

"If you want his bones, go down and get them. This is the fate of an accursed spy."

"BY COMMITTEE."

"Then they have done fer Arizona Dick, hev they?"

"I don't see his bones."

"Plenty of bones hyerabouts, Sheriff Owens."

This was true; at the base of the towering cliff were the bones of animals and men commingled.

Grim evidence, this, that the high trail far above had witnessed accident or tragedy in the past, and that here brave men, perchance, had lost their lives, none knowing their fate.

And these horsemen?

Sheriff Owens, the noted sheriff of Apache county, and a *posse*, out upon a grim mission, and that mission the capture or killing of Desert Dave.

Commodore Perry Owens, his name, and he was at that time a terror to evil-doers of every grade and stamp. He had killed at least a dozen such, outright, and had wounded and taken full fifty more, by himself alone.

"Yes, but not the bones of Arizona Dick," this remarkable man declared, after a further brief study of the message, and a look at the board that held it, and at the basket of rope.

"How do you prove it?" asked his second in command.

"This note and piece of board have come together recently, not more than a few days ago at most."

"The deuce you say! How do you read that?"

"Plain as day. Use your brains and you will see, Charlie. The end of the stick has been freshly splintered, you see—"

"Might have happened in the fall, if it came from the cliff trail."

"Yes, but it is on two sides, and shows where it has been forced into a crack or crevice in the rock—"

"Nothing more to say, sheriff."

"And then the paper, it is not discolored, nor has it been on the stick long enough to show any different color under it. That rope, too, shows fresh cuts by a keen knife."

"That settles it, Sheriff Owens. We know you kin read signs where nobody else ked see a thing. But, ther meanin' of et?"

"That is something else."

The noted sheriff studied the paper again, trying, evidently, to make out the whole story from its single page alone.

"The outlaws have done this," he decided.

"Devil Dave, think ye?"

"As likely as not. No other than outlaws would have reason to send Arizona Dick to his death. These men have been fellows who feared Dick as a detective."

"You ar' right, you ar' right."

"And what's to be done?" asked he, called Charlie.

"We must investigate this, Pistol Charlie," was the answer. "If Arizona Dick's body is anywhere around here, it must have burial."

"But, it isn't here, nor anywhere in sight. Wait, though, and I'll ride out and take a look at the face of the cliff. It is possible that it has lodged somewhere. Be back again in a minute or two."

So saying, the handsome, bronzed-faced youngest member of the *posse* spurred out over the sandy plain to a distance from the base of the mountain, and stopped.

This little company of horsemen had been riding along under the cooling shades of the towering mountain cliff.

Further out, the brazen sun poured its rays down upon the burning sands with fierce force, for here was one of the wild, weary stretches of Arizona desert.

As far as the eye could reach, in one direction, was nothing but waste and sand, with here and there a boulder that had at some time or other fallen from the mountains.

A lone cactus stood here and there, like a grim sentinel of the waste, but nothing else, save perchance now and again a stunted bush.

Out into this glaring sunlight rode Pistol Charlie.

When he had gone a sufficient distance from the base of the cliff, as said, he came to a stop, and, shading his eyes with his hand, looked upward.

For thousands of feet rose the sheer face of mountain wall, so high that the line that marked the trail above could not be distinguished from the desert plain below.

The young plainsman looked searchingly, but nothing caught his eye that in any manner awakened his curiosity.

Just when he removed his gaze, however, and lowered his hand, he saw something.

Whatever it was, it compelled him to look again.

It might have been a bird.

Shading his eyes as before, he looked long and searchingly in the same direction, and presently it was seen again.

No bird was it, but something white, close to the rocky wall, looking as if it might be a signal flag waved by some army scout perched on the bold face of the cliff.

But that was all; no human form could be

made out—in fact, none was there; nothing but the sheer rock wall, against which the something white fluttered. It might be a bit of paper, or cloth, that had caught there by some means from some source; and yet—

Hal! it disappeared.

Unslung his Winchester from his back, the sheriff's right-hand man threw the rifle to his shoulder and fired a shot.

Immediately those whom he had left under the shadow of the cliff were seen to awaken to interest, and in a moment more they came dashing out across the sand, the sheriff in the lead.

Pistol Charlie noted this, but kept his eyes fixed upon the point where the white something had appeared and disappeared.

Some seconds passed, and then it was seen again.

About enough time had elapsed for the sound of the report of the rifle to be carried over the intervening distance.

The white something came out as before, in the same spot, and this time it was waved with more force. There was no mistaking it now; it was a signal flag in a human hand!

Pistol Charlie fired another shot, and in a few seconds the waving proved that it had been heard.

"What is it, Pistol Charlie?" demanded Sheriff Owens, coming up.

"Hev ye sighted Injun?" cried Ned Winfield, another of the *posse*. "Or is et Desert Dave?"

"I give it up," Pistol Charlie answered. "There is a signal up there, however, whatever it may mean."

He indicated the fluttering bit of white, and following the direction of his finger, the others were soon able to sight it.

"It is a signal, sure enough," said Sheriff Owens.

"But, whar's the man?" cried Don McKenzie, another of the *posse*.

"That is the question; there is nothing but the bare rock in sight. I can't make it out."

"Must be a rag that's caught there."

"No, I have proven that it isn't that," declared Charlie Brusk. "Fire a shot, and you will see."

Two or three of the men fired their rifles in the air together.

They watched, and in a few seconds the waving increased, showing that it was in answer to the signal shots.

"This thing has got to be looked into," declared Sheriff Owens. "If there is a human up there, he is a helpless prisoner, unable to get up or down. But, how came he there?"

"If we only had a glass," suggested Pistol Charlie.

"You are right; that might reveal something. But, as it looks with the naked eye, there is no place for a man to lodge at that point. What do you say, Maxwell?"

Frank Maxwell had remarkably keen sight, which had been tested on more occasions than one. He had been gazing steadily at the flag without speaking, till now.

"There's no place for a man there, you are right," he said. "Seems to me, though, that there is a hole in the face of the cliff, and that the flag is waved from that. Hal there it disappears; that's what I was waiting for. See that dark line on the rock?"

"That's so, by great!"

"And the man, whoever it is, must be behind that."

"Then can it be Arizona Dick?" questioned Pistol Charlie, "if he was thrown from the trail?"

"There is only one way to find out," said the sheriff, "and that is to investigate the case. No matter who the person is, we must rescue him at all hazard. What say?"

"We are with ye, Sheriff Owens."

"But, how?"

"It's a thousand feet up to that place

from here, and as many feet down to it from the trail above," reminded Pistol Charlie. "It is impossible to reach the place from either direction."

"That's true."

"If we only had a rope long enough and strong enough—"

"Would you be the one willing to descend that distance from the cliff trail, if we had?"

For the moment Pistol Charlie was silent.

"Yes, I would, and will!" he finally declared, decisively, "with you to hold me. But, it is useless to talk about that, for we have no such rope."

"And nothing to make one with."

"Let's give the fellow another salute."

"Yes, do so," said the sheriff. "All together!"

The signal volley was fired.

After a few seconds the something white appeared again, but this time in a different manner.

It darted out from the face of the cliff like a bird, and came fluttering its way down, down, and down, proof that it was weighted to insure its prompt descent to the bottom.

Another volley was fired immediately, and again a signal flag was seen at the same spot on the cliff, as at first, where it waved in answer to the voice of the rifles. By this time the other flag was lying at the base of the wall.

Pistol Charlie dashed away to secure it.

"Stay where you are," he shouted back. "I'll bring it to you."

When he reached the base of the cliff he immediately found the object, and throwing himself sidewise picked it up from the ground without dismounting.

He rode immediately back to where he had left the sheriff and his comrades, but he could not resist the temptation to examine the strange signal from the clouds—as it were, as he rode.

It proved to be the half of a man's white under garment, in one corner of which a stone was tied, and inside, close to the stone, was pinned a sheet of paper, evidently the leaf out of a small book; but this Pistol Charlie did not remove, feeling that this belonged to the sheriff.

He did, however, note the signature—Arizona Dick.

"What have you there?" demanded Sheriff Owens, as soon as Charlie came within hailing distance.

"A message from the cliff!" Pistol Charlie responded. "There is a man there, sure enough, and that man is one we guessed."

"Arizona Dick?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!" cried the others. "We'll find more'n his bones, I reckon."

"Yes, you are right," agreed the sheriff.

"But, let's see what he has to say to us, then we'll know what to do."

Pistol Charlie gave the weighted piece of cloth a toss as he rode up, and the sheriff deftly catching it, made all haste to get at the important part—the message it bore.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEIR LIVING TOMB.

At the time when the death-trap rock closed down over Arizona Dick and his two companions, Dick felt that his doom was certain.

There was a heavy weight at his heart, and he felt that now the end had come. Brave as he was, the hero of a hundred adventures, there was something in that heavy thud that awed him.

And added to that, the taunts of Desert Dave and his minions, and the rolling of the boulder to its place to wedge the tilting rock so that it would remain immovable and secret-locked—all of which the prisoners were

kept informed of by their worse than assassins.

Then the parting laugh, and the sound of their retreating footsteps.

One of the three prisoners was moaning.

"Who is hurt?" asked Dick.

"It's I," answered Tom Stannard. "My arm is broke."

"That's a bad situation, sure enough. How are you, Apache John? Alive and kicking?"

"You kin bet your hide that I am, boyee!" was the answer. "Et will take more of a fall than that ter knock Apache John out, and don't you fergit et."

"Well, we are doomed," said Stannard.

"It looks that way," Dick acquiesced, "but while there is life there is hope, you know."

"Better for us had they pitched us over the cliff, or shot us, for that would have been death swift and sure; while this, my God! this will be horrible!"

"Your accident has crushed your hope," said Dick. "I knew that either of the other fates would place us beyond the last ray of hope; for that reason I angered the outlaw as I did."

"You invited this fate—indeed, you brought it upon us."

"Exactly; and for the reason that there is just the bare possibility that we may get out of the trap. I have been in tight places before."

"But never such a place as this, I venture to say."

"Well, no."

"But, ther boyee ar' right," assured Apache John. "Our hearts are a-thumpin' yet, and while that action is goin' on inside, ther is some chance fer a feller. My 'sperience has been that et don't do ter give up."

"But, what am I to do with this arm?"

"That 'ar has got ter be 'tended to. Dicky, ef you hev got a match, let us have a light on ther subject, ef only fer a minnit."

Arizona Dick felt in his pocket and brought forth some matches, and lighting one, their place of imprisonment was revealed to them. It looked like a living tomb.

Over head was rock, the same on all sides, and likewise the floor, but here was some wash that had been forced in by wind and rain—very little the latter, perhaps, for Arizona is the driest of dry lands; but, it was here, and to its presence was due the fact that their fall had done them no more serious damage.

"But, and what they most looked for—there appeared to be no outlet whatever, no open that gave birth to a hope in their hearts."

They stood and stared until the match expired.

"What did I say?" demanded Tom Stannard.

"I guess you spoke the truth."

So said Dick.

"But," he added, "we are not going to sit down and suck our thumbs by any means; we'll make every effort, and only die when we can't find anything better to do; eh, Apache John?"

"Great sands! I sh'ud say so," cried the old man—though he was not old in point of fact. "We ar' goin' to git right up an' hump our backs, you kin bet, an' ef we don't git out of hyer et will be 'cause—'cause we can't, that's all. Never say die till ther cussed Apaches gits ye."

Apache John was the bitter foe of the Apaches.

Years before they had killed his wife and children, and burned his home, and he had barely escaped with his life.

Since then he had done little else than hang upon their trail, picking them off one by one with his unerring rifle, till at this time more than seventy had fallen by his hand!

"But, to attend to that broken arm," said Dick.

"Yes, boyee, that 'ar must be done ter oncet, in some fashion, an' then we'll see what's ter bedid 'bout gittin' out o' hyer."

Lighting another match, Dick looked around for something with which to make a more lasting light, but nothing was to be had, and the supply of matches was not great, by any means.

"Hyers somethin' that will do ther biz," announced Apache John, just as the match went out.

"What is it?" demanded Dick.

"Some slivers of shale which we kin bind on his arm. We'll have to tear up a shirt to do et, though."

"No matter; if we have to tear two, that arm has got to be fixed. But, I was just then looking around for something that would burn, something to give us more light upon our misery."

"You say you have found shale?" asked Stannard.

"Thet's what et ar'."

"A sign that there may be bitumen here. If you can find that, you will have something to make a light."

Arizona Dick lighted another match, and Apache John thrust a piece of the shale into its flame, but with no result, of course, so far as making a light was concerned.

"Here you have it!" exclaimed Stannard, and he pointed to some black substance that lay along one side of their tomb.

Apache John stepped to it and tried it with the sliver of stone he had in his hand, and found that it yielded.

"Get some of it, and try it to the match," Stannard directed.

The old Indian-fighter twisted the splinter in the substance, and some of it adhered.

Touching it to the match, what was their delight to find that it blazed up with a bright flame, giving them plenty of light!

"Excellent!" exclaimed Arizona Dick. "Live and learn."

"You must take care not to drop any fire into the supply, though," cautioned Stannard.

"That would be a sad mishap for us, I can imagine," rejoined Dick. "But, I will take care of the light; you, Apache John, attend to our pard's arm."

The desert scout and plainsman had had experience of this kind before, and in half an hour he had done as thorough a job as the means at hand rendered possible.

"Now," said Stannard, "I am of little use, with only one arm, but I can at least hold the light while you work."

And this duty fell to him.

Hours, then, were spent in the attempt to find some way of moving the rock trap, but spent in vain.

It was as immovable as the mountain itself, and with no means with which to work they were worse than helpless in their living tomb. A feeling of dread filled their hearts.

Then, too, the smoke of the burning bitumen filled the place, and finally they were forced to put out the light.

They threw themselves on the ground to rest, and fell asleep.

How long they had slept they could not tell, but when they awoke they found that the tiny cavern was free of smoke, and that the air was again pure and fresh.

They arose refreshed, but hungry, and Dick made a new torch, but this time a small one, knowing that the smoke could not accumulate so fast if this was done.

"There's proof that air comes from somewhere," he reasoned, "and it is possible that it will carry off this little smoke so that we can keep a light ail the time."

"And it is important to learn where the air comes from," reminded Stannard.

"Bet yer life et aire; et may help us out."

The eldest of the trio immediately began to search for its source, and finally he discovered it.

Away off in one corner, where he could

barely crawl, he felt the air coming up alongside the wall, and at the discovery he gave a shout of encouragement.

"Hyar et ar!" he exclaimed. "Now we hev only got ter drill a hole an' foller ther vein ter git to ther head of ther drift. We'll git out of hyar, boyees, ef we hev to overturn ther hull mounting range!"

This discovery awakened hope, and all attention was concentrated upon that part of the cavern, till finally another discovery followed the first.

Further on into the corner, where Arizona Dick forced his body, was a loose stone, which, on being worked, suddenly gave way and went thundering down into the depths below.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD?

SHERIFF OWENS's men stood eagerly around, to learn what word the message had for them.

"It is from Arizona Dick, sure enough," the sheriff confirmed, as soon as he opened it and glanced at it.

"And what does he say?" demanded Don McKenzie. "That is the 'portant part fer us; hey, boys? You kin bet et ar!"

"It is brief and right to the point," declared the sheriff. "He asks if we are friends who will help him out of trouble, that's all."

"But, how are we to answer him?" asked Pistol Charlie.

"By firing three shots, five seconds apart, as a signal. Fire them so, Charlie."

Three shots were fired as directed; then the sheriff and his posse waited to note what the result of the signal would be.

In a few seconds the response came.

The white signal was seen as at first, waving for a moment, and then suddenly it darted downward in the same manner as the first.

"Another message!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"You are right. This hyer is growin' interestin', darn me ef et ain't!"

They rode forward in a body toward the base of the cliff, to the point where the weighted cloth must drop.

Pistol Charlie picked it up from the ground on a run, turning with it and tossing it to the sheriff as before, and all came to a stop to learn the contents of the message.

Sheriff Owens read it aloud, as follows:

"FRIENDS:—

"Come to our rescue or we perish. We have been three days horribly imprisoned in a mountain cavern from which there is no escape, and we are almost maddened with thirst and hunger. You cannot reach us from below nor above, but follow these directions: Come up to the ledge trail, and follow along that, finally turning into the narrow blind trail after passing the high cliff. At a distance of two rods from the end of the wall, stop and listen. If you will come, let the signal be three shots as before."

"ARIZONA DICK."

"The poor devils!" exclaimed the sheriff, moved to pity.

"Wonder how they come there?" questioned Pistol Charlie. "They say they have been imprisoned."

"Maybe the work of the Arizona Devil, Desert Dave. But, we must rescue them if possible; give them the signal shots, McKenzie!"

The shots were fired in the same manner as before, and looking up, the posse presently saw some object which looked to be a hat, waved where the white cloth had appeared. And that was all.

Three days and three nights in that horrible living tomb!

Almost crazed with hunger and thirst, yet the three prisoners clung to life, hoping against hope.

But now, at last, help was promised!

We have purposely omitted the record of those long, weary hours of struggle and hardship, not having the space to devote to what would be a tale of struggle of keenest interest.

How Arizona Dick, at first alone, went down into the dangerous depths into which the loosened rock had fallen; how, for hours and hours, he explored the dividing and zigzagging passages, until finally he came to a point where the light of day entered through a crack in the face of the cliff.

Here he could see the stretch of sand far below, but was as far cut off from freedom as if buried beneath the mountain at its utmost depth.

How he made his way back again his companions; following the marked course he had left in order that he might not lose his way, and how all three had come to this place where they could at any rate see one another's faces and where they could drink in the pure, fresh air.

How Dick and Apache John, in turns, explored further; but finally, in despair, they had dropped down near this narrow opening to await their fate. And then, joy! the sound of human voices borne faintly to their quickened hearing from the depths far below; then renewed signaling—which Tom Stannard had been keeping up almost constantly during every hour of daylight.

It now took them hours to get back again to the place where they had been entrapped, but it also took the rescue party hours to travel the distance around to gain the high cliff trail.

Arizona Dick and his companions fell weak and faint upon the floor of their death-trap, and so remained.

Some time passed thus.

Finally to their ears came the welcome sound of the tread of horses' hoofs, and Dick sprang to his feet.

The tread came on and on, finally stopping at a point overhead, and when all was still Arizona Dick raised his voice and shouted with all his might—"Halloo!"

He was heard, and the answer was prompt.

"Halloo!"

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"And understand my words?"

"Yes, yes. Tell us how to get at you, and we'll have you out of there."

"Thank God! Well, first of all, take this caution: Do not advance to the end of the passage. If you do, it will be to your doom."

"All right. But, how's that?"

"There is a turning stone, and it will tip with you."

"Ha! then you got in there by accident?"

"No: we were put here by Desert Dave, into whose hands we were entrapped."

"Just what we thought," spoke Pistol Charlie to the sheriff. "But, now to get them out of there, Commodore."

"How can we get at you?" the sheriff called out.

"There is a boulder somewhere that locks the tilting rock. If you can find that and loosen it, and roll it to the end of the passage, and then all get off the rock at the other end, the boulder will tilt it."

"Good enough, we'll see about it. Ha! this must be the very boulder, for it is the only one in sight."

The particulars need not be dwelt upon.

When the boulder was loosened and rolled to the end of the table rock, and the other end was freed of weight, the rock began to turn and light poured into the hole beneath.

The amazement of the sheriff and his men found vent in their ejaculations of surprise.

"Thunderation!" the sheriff cried. "Who would have thought of a place like this? It looks like the pot-lid to the tropical clime, I'm hanged if it don't!"

"The devil himself must have invented the trap," cried Pistol Charlie, in rejoinder. "I never heard of this place before, did you, Commodore Owens?"

"Never, Charlie."

The tilting rock, moving slowly at first, suddenly tipped down with a quick motion, and the boulder plunged off!

Arizona Dick and his companions were well back out of the way, and anxiously awaited the result of the experiment, the venture upon which their lives probably depended.

The rock table freed, began immediately to ascend again, but the boulder, descending from the point where it had struck the ground, rolled under the edge of it and wedged there with so much force that probably a locomotive could not have removed it.

"Thank God! saved!"

So cried Dick, and the others echoed the thanksgiving.

"Who are you all?" inquired the sheriff.

"You'd orter know me, Commodore Owens," spoke up Apache John, showing himself in the light. "That is ter say, ef ye kin reckernize these hyer bones."

"Apache John!"

"Ther same."

"The very man I was anxious to fall in with. But, boys, to get them out of there. Make a ladder of your lariats and drop it down to them."

The posse immediately set about carrying out this order, and while they were so engaged the sheriff and Arizona Dick exchanged further remarks and information was given and received.

When, finally, the three prisoners were rescued from their living tomb, an examination showed that a little force would send the turning table from its pivot, after the shock it had received from the boulder, and that force was applied and the rock toppled over with a crash.

It filled the opening almost completely, and looking at it, no one could ever guess the death-trap it had formerly been, or the untold secrets that lay hidden under it in the mountain depths. It had played its part; its service was forever ended.

CHAPTER X.

HORRIBLE DISCOVERY.

"THEY are doomed, sheriff, they ar' doomed!" cried Apache John.

"Do you think so, Apache John?" the sheriff asked, as they stopped at the dividing of the ways.

"Sartain sure of et, Commodore. This is ther way to ther nearest spring; they hev took the way to the burnin' valley, an' they'll never return no more unless they have a mighty supply of water."

"Then our duty is plain," said Dick. "We must push on to their aid, even at the risk of our lives."

"Don't be foolish, boyee!" Apache John reproved.

"Too much danger?"

"Decided, lad. We might overtake 'em, but thar we would be, not a bit o' use to 'em, an' would have ter fight ter git out ourselves. Ther fact is, we ain't got enough water to risk et, an' we must go to the springs ther very first thing we do an' git some."

"And meantime leave these poor emigrants to their fate?"

"Don't see how we kin help et. My heart is jest as big as ther next man's, but only a howlin' idiot would run such a risk."

"Apache John is right," coincided the

sheriff. "The first law of nature is to look out for self; still, something ought to be done, and must be done, somehow. A guide must be sent after them."

"Et's plain they ain't got none," declared Apache John. "Or ef they have, he has lost his head."

"Let me propose something," said Dick.

"What is it?"

"Give me all the water you can spare, and I will go after them and guide them aright, if I find them alive."

"That's well said, boyee," approved Apache John; "but, who is goin' to guide you? I have got ther name of knowin' this hyer kentry as well as any man livin', an' even I haven't ther best o' knowledge of et all."

"I have a compass," declared Dick, taking a pocket compass from his pocket and showing it.

"That will be o' some use, I allow."

"I'll take the risks. You give me the location of that spring from here, and I'll map the course of this trail so as to keep my bearings and hold the direction of the spring all right."

"And I'll go with you," cried Tom Stannard, his arm in a sling.

"I must veto that 'ar, right off short," declared Apache John. "We must give ther boyee all ther water that kin be spared, an' we can't spare enough ter supply two, that's a dead loss."

Stannard bowed his head in submission.

"What do you say?" urged Dick. "As God spared my life, so will I risk it for the saving of others."

"I opine that we won't hev et that way, boyee," cried the desert guide. "I am ther most wuthless cuss in the herd, an' I'll be ther one ter go. You kin push on to the spring—"

"Enough of that!" disputed Dick. "You are the guide of this posse, and not one of us will hear of your leaving it. Give me water, and I'll be off. You, when you have reached the spring and taken a supply, may then set forth to intercept me if you want to, but I am going to take this risk alone."

"That settles it," said Sheriff Owens. "There's no doubt but he will pull through, Apache John, for he has got the grit of a tiger. Take your pick of our horses, Dick, and God speed you."

"Thanks, sheriff," Dick acknowledged. "This horse will do, and I hope we'll meet again all right."

"Meet!" cried Apache John. "We'll meet, boyee, ef I have ter sift ther sands o' these hyer scorchin' plains ter find ye, and don't ye fergit et. Ef you ain't at ther springs in twenty-four hours, I'll be after ye wi' a s'arch-warrant."

It was some days after the rescue of Dick and his two companions from the hidden mountain cavern.

Nourishment, rest and care had restored them again to almost their full degree of strength, and the two parties, now combined, were upon the trail of Desert Dave and his outlaw band.

The time was early morning.

The sun was not yet sending its rays across the plain, but they had been moving for some hours in order to escape its heat.

And, in the course of their journey, they had struck the trail of a caravan and had followed it along in order to learn something about where it was going and whence it had come.

Finally, coming to a point where two trails divided, and where the caravan had taken what appeared to be the broader, Apache John gave voice to the words with which this chapter opens. Well he knew that the emigrants had entered upon a trail to their death.

Arizona Dick was given a liberal supply of water for himself and horse, and after

shaking hands with every one of the party he turned his face to the northwest and set forward alone.

Apache John, Sheriff Owens and the others looked after him for some time before going on their way.

"Et's a risk," declared the desert guide, shaking his head ominously, "but ef any man kin pull through, Dick is that man."

"And he'll pull through," prophesied Tom Stannard. "I never saw a man of such grit in my life. Only for him we would never have come out of that mountain death-hole alive."

"I believe ye, by jumpin'!" cried Apache John. "He hadn't only ther grit, but brains ter back et up with."

"You are right."

"Well, Apache John, let's press on to the springs," urged the sheriff, "and from there we will head immediately to meet Dick and the party whom he will undertake to guide."

"Yas, forward!" said the scout. "That's thar way," pointing, "same as I directed et to Dickey. This hyer trail is ther smallest an' least likely lookin' but et is ther straight an' narrer path that leads ter water, you kin rely on't. We'll git thar 'fore ther sun gits too scorchin' hot ter travel."

And thus they set forward, their lives depending on the finding of water, and woe to Apache John had he misled them!

But, that was next to impossible, skilled as he was.

They journeyed on.

The day was a repetition of the day that had gone before it; the picture needs not to be drawn again.

Along the hot, blinding trail Arizona Dick urged his beast, merciful withal yet not permitting it to stop for a single moment from a steady pace, save occasionally for a sip of the precious water.

Evidences of the desperate situation of the emigrants were found all along the way.

Here and there the carcass of a horse; at other places stuff that had been thrown away to lighten the wagons as much as possible. Everything to indicate the horror of their ultimate fate.

Steadily forward Dick pressed, under the burning sun, following he trail that was so plain that a blind man could have followed it; on, and still on, and the desert growing more and more desolate, if possible, with every mile traversed; on, and still on.

Finally the end.

Looking ahead from a certain slight eminence, Dick saw a dark spot on the expanse of waste, and eagles soaring above told only too plainly what it was.

"But, there are no wagons; where can they be?" he asked himself.

He looked in vain for them.

Steadily he pressed on, at a walk, of course, and in due time reached the awful scene of a massacre.

His heart was almost chilled with horror at the sight; nothing more terrible or appalling had ever come under his notice during all his experience on mountain and plains.

"The work of savages!" he exclaimed. "I cannot believe that even Devil Dave and his band could do a deed like this. And yet—"

He had sprung from the saddle and was scanning the sands around the spot, and there, to his practiced eye, the truth was revealed. No Indians had done the crime; it must have been outlaws.

He widened his search, and finally found tracks where one man had staggered after the wide-tired wagons in the course they had taken, and he believed that one of the party had escaped with his life. It was impossible for him to stop to bury the dead; every hour was precious, and he could never have survived the task in such heat.

CHAPTER XI.

TAKING UP THE DEATH-TRAIL.

NEARLY similar scenes surrounded the others—the sheriff and his posse.

Apache John, however, knowing the desert as he did, led them through a part that was slightly less scorchingly hot.

There were signs that betokened water somewhere, though not a drop could be found there, nor could any but the most experienced have discerned the signs of its presence.

On and on, the same as Arizona Dick, careful of their supply, and finally they sighted the cacti and mesquite ahead.

"Thar et is!" cried Apache John.

"Then you were not mistaken," said Sheriff Owens.

"Mistaken? You kin bet I wouldn't venture hyer, ef I hadn't been sure."

Their horses sniffed the air and increased their pace, no doubt smelling the water from afar.

Nearer they drew, and nearer, and finally the dark spot that marked the hidden spring was discerned, and they allowed their horses to break into a canter.

Not that they were out of water; they still had some, but the beasts had been placed on an allowance and were eager to plunge their nostrils into the pool and drink their fill.

Nearer, and then an exclamation of horror from the man in the lead.

"What is it, McKenzie?" asked Commodore Owens.

"Dead wimmen!"

"What?"

"Ther fact."

"It can't be possible—"

But, there was the proof before their eyes.

They dashed on and dismounted, and under the excitement the horses dashed into the pools unrestrained.

"Good heavens! but this is horrible!" cried Sheriff Owens. "Some desperate crime has been committed, and this marks the final act of the savages that committed the deed."

"No savages done et," cried Apache John.

"I know *their* way; this was the doin's of cussed whites."

"Then it has been the work of the Desert Devil."

"I 'gree with ye."

"My God!"

The cry came from Tom Stannard.

"What is et, boyee?" demanded Apache John, turning to him.

"This woman—I knew her in life; she was the wife of my mother's brother; my aunt!"

"No."

"There can be no mistake— Oh! heavens! and her daughter Nellie, my cousin! Great God, give me life and strength to avenge this horrible work! Register my vow to hunt these devils down to their death!"

So impressive his words and manner, that all stood awed.

"Are you sure you have identified them aright?" asked the sheriff. "There is no mistake?"

"No, no! I am only too certain. I saw them less than three years ago in their Indiana home, but had not heard from them since. What brought them here I cannot imagine."

"What's their names?"

"Wagner."

The young man was standing with his hand pressed to his forehead, in a dazed, or stupefied manner.

They understood what had taken place there; it needed no explaining—even less than is needed here. Death had been a welcome friend to these poor victims of inhuman cruelty.

"And the others?" asked the sheriff.

"I do not know then, sir."

"Evident that they were all of one party."

"And thar is the way they kem," Apache John called attention to the trail.

"Yes, and there has been a fire—"

"Plain as day, to me," the scout went on. "They fell in with the outlaws, thar was a wholesale murder, and these wimmen wur brought here. The wagons and all the stuff wur burned."

"And Dick has made his detour in vain."

"Yes, that's so. But, cuss me! look at them 'ar hosses! They have sp'iled every drop of water in ther springs!"

The horses had indeed roiled the springs so that it was unfit for drinking until it could settle again, and the men quickly got them out of it and placed them at a distance.

That having been done, the women were given burial.

It had meantime been decided that it was needless to go forth to meet Arizona Dick.

With a trail so plain, he could not fail to make his way to the springs in a reasonable time. If he did not, it would be better to go after the sun sunk lower.

Not a thing could be found to tell the particulars of these pilgrims' coming to this desert land, and Tom Stannard was eager to press on to learn more, but he yielded.

Three hours later a horseman was seen coming along the trail made by the caravan, coming slowly and wearily.

Attention was called to him immediately by the discoverer.

"It's Arizona Dick!" cried Apache John at once.

"I can't be sure of it, yet," said the sheriff.

"Yes, it is, though!" insisted Frank Maxwell, whose keenness of sight we have had occasion to mention before. "And he is carrying a man with him on the saddle. I see it plainly."

"Jest what my long-range optics tell me, too," declared Apache John. "You hev good eyes, boyee, darn me ef you haven't."

They watched the approach of the rider till he came up.

Arizona Dick it was.

The man he held before him on the horse's back was apparently lifeless, but it was known that he must be alive or Dick would not have brought him in.

"Take this man," Dick said huskily, as he relaxed his hold on him. "I am played out, and must rest before I speak a word more than necessary. Bring him to if you can; the only living man of the whole company."

Relieved of his burden, Arizona Dick slipped from the saddle and threw himself upon the ground under the shade of a cactus, where he lay as still as if dead.

The others did what they could to restore the unconscious man.

Stannard, who had been a little distance apart, now came up, and at sight of the man he cried:

"My own cousin, Enoch Wagner! He is the brother of the poor girl we buried, friends, and no doubt he can tell us the whole story if we can save his life. I pray God to spare him for vengeance's sake."

For one hour Arizona Dick lay motionless.

At the end of that time the other man had been brought to, but his mind wandered and he could give no information.

Dick now got up, called for water, and when he had drank some, in which some brandy had been mixed, he felt refreshed and equal to the task of talking, though his appearance told what a terrible experience he had passed through.

"It was terrible," he declared—"the massacre. Men all in a heap. If the work of Desert Dave, the worst that can be done to him will be too tame to repay him as he deserves." And he related what he had found, in full, as known to the reader.

"I could not bury them; I knew it would be fatal to attempt it," he declared. "So, I came on upon the trail of the man who had

followed the wagons. And it was like following the footprints of a drunken man. They were here, there and everywhere, but still they kept to the trail with dogged determination. And finally I came in sight of the man, about an hour before I reached here.

"He was standing in the burning sand, waving his arms and singing wildly, and I knew he had gone mad. I was scarcely equal to the effort, but I overcame him and got him on my horse, and when I had given him a drink he went off in a faint and lay like a log till you relieved me of his weight."

"Perhaps he can tell the story, if he lives, but further than this I know no more than do you. What I do know, however, if God spares my life I will devote it to the hunting down of these devils!"

"Your hand on that!" cried Tom Stannard.

"Yas, an' both o' mine," echoed the old desert scout. "Ef they was real Injun my blood couldn't b'ile any more'n what et does."

"But, you are not to forget that the law must be observed," reminded Sheriff Owens. "These outlaws must be captured, if possible, and landed in the Arizona Penitentiary."

"There to be clothed and fed, to be kept cool in summer and warm in winter—never!" cried Tom Stannard. "The highest law, in such a case as this, is vengeance, and that shall be mine—I have sworn it! Do not try to cheat me out of it, I warn you, my friends."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF THE HANDS.

SHERIFF OWENS turned away.

Dick followed him a few paces and engaged him in conversation.

What their talk was about, it is not the purpose of our story to reveal, and indeed we have no right to know.

They gave their attention to the man whose life they were trying to save, and by night had the satisfaction of seeing the light of reason appear in his eyes once more.

"Do you know me, Enoch?" asked Tom Stannard.

"No—yes—no, I do not know you. Great heavens! what a dream I have had. Have I been sick?"

"Don't you know Tom Stannard?"

"Tom!"

"Yes, it is Tom. What was your dream, Enoch?"

The other had raised himself upon his elbow, and was staring wildly at the faces around him.

"Was it a dream?" he demanded. "Who are all these? Where's father—mother—Nellie, and the rest? My God! assure me that it was not true, Tom!"

"There, there, Enoch, you must bear up; you must live for revenge, you know, and we are bound to have it. There, there, do not excite yourself; you must live for that one purpose."

"Then it was true, great God, it was true!"

"Yes."

The lone survivor of the fated caravan buried his face in his hands and sobs shook his frame.

He was a strong, broad-shouldered young man, with a resolute face, but was now weak from loss of blood and exposure to the heat, to say nothing of hunger and thirst, particularly the latter.

For some moments no one spoke.

Presently, weak as he was, the young man staggered to his feet.

"Water!" he then exclaimed. "More water! I must gain strength for the work before me! I must live!"

The water was given, with something stronger, and he took it eagerly.

"I must live! I will live!" he repeated, exercising his limbs.

"You must take it easy," cautioned Dick.

"Yes, yes, but I can gain my grit better this way than on my back. How about my wound?"

"It is only a crease on top of the head," explained Arizona Dick. "That will not be much trouble to you, if the bone is not cracked."

"That was what knocked me out—"

"And what saved your life," interrupted Stannard. "They left you for dead, Enoch."

"And I am the only one—"

"The only one."

Little by little the whole terrible truth was made known to him, and when he came to know that the graves of his mother and sister, and her whom he had expected to wed, were so near at hand, he threw himself upon them utterly overcome.

Verily, the whirlwind of vengeance was forming against Devil Dave and his evil band!

Wagner at length told his story.

His father's brother, Peter Wagner, had struck it rich at the new camp of Quartz Corral, and owned the richest claim there. He had just got it into working order when he met with an accident.

Knowing that he must die, he decided the claim to his brother, and sent the deed to him, telling him to come on with his family and take possession, as it would more than enrich him for life, after a little time spent in working it; and the brother had set out to respond to the summons.

With the family of a neighbor, whose daughter Enoch expected to make his wife, they sold out their little places in Indiana and started West, and in due time reached the nearest railroad point in the Territory to their destination. And there, to their dismay, they found they had to cross a stretch of desert, or else go around a distance of more than four hundred miles.

The distance across was less than one hundred.

Consulting plainsmen, they found that the desert, while dangerous, was not impassable and they resolved to cross.

While they were making ready, and trying to select a guide, a man came to them and offered his services free in order to go across to the new Eldorado himself in their company.

He was a homely man, with a face that suggested the lizard and a skin that looked not unlike leather, and he was a stranger, but on being questioned, by men who knew something about the desert, it was found that he was posted and evidently knew the plains well.

He was engaged.

In due time the little company pushed forward to complete their journey, and this man, Bill Lake by name, acted as guide.

He seemed to know his business and the desert alike thoroughly, and made as direct a route to the first water-holes, and the second, as could be made, and confidence was reposed in him.

Finally, however, he was missing, one morning, and though the company waited many hours he did not return, and they decided to press forward without him.

It was argued that they could not follow and find him, not being used to such work, while, he, if alive, could follow their trail and overtake them. And so, they pushed on their way.

It was their way to doom!

They missed the next springs, which their guide had told them were but a day's travel distant, and their water began to give out.

The next morning they came to a place where two trails forked, and after debate they took the wider of the two, and, as it proved, the fatal one. And then came what has already been told.

Among the outlaws who attacked them was recognized their traitor guide, whom the outlaws called Lizard Luke!

This man Enoch Wagner at once tried to kill.

Ere he could do so, however, he felt his senses reel and knew no more of what took place.

When he came to he found himself oppressed by a weight, and, to his horror, on further recovering his senses, found that he was lying under the dead bodies of his father, his brothers and the rest.

Dragging himself out, almost crazed, he looked for the wagons, but they were gone.

There was their trail, however.

He had not been disarmed, and taking some of the others' weapons as well, he staggered forward to follow where the trail led.

With a prayer to God to lend him strength and permit him to escape with his life, he staggered on his way, barely able to drag one foot after the other, but with the one thought, vengeance, to sustain him.

He had no recollection of Dick, or of anything further than his setting out.

That was his story.

"I reckon we hev business at Quartz Corral," observed Apache John, when he had heard the story.

"You think they have gone there?" asked the sheriff.

"It is the nearest place."

"And the most likely," agreed Arizona Dick. "They have with them whatever papers these emigrants carried, and among others no doubt the deed to that mine."

"Ther cussed Apaches!" cried the old scout. "Do ye think they would dar' to go thar and lay claim to that mine in ther name of this emigrant that they hev murdered hyer on ther sands?"

"Desert Dave dares to do anything," averred Sheriff Owens.

"I believe ye, by tarnell!"

"First of all to regain all the strength possible," said Dick, "for this man could not stand it to move now," indicating Wagner. "And then to push forward and run these desert demons to the ground. May their patron imp help them if ever we are able to lay hands on them!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSPICIONS AWAKENED.

LET us return to the camp of Quartz Corral.

The claimants to ownership of the Jewel Mine had, as said, been installed in possession.

No one was in position to question their right to the property, even if any one had a suspicion that all was not just as it should be.

They immediately began to explore their new acquisition, yet not in a manner that went to prove that they knew anything about its merits or defects, and the day had not passed when this sign appeared:

THIS MINE FOR SALE.

"What's the matter?" asked the marshal, as soon as he heard of it. "Net going to work the claim?"

"That's what is the matter, neighbor," was the answer. "We have made up our minds that we know more about farmin' than we do about minin'."

"But, I thought you would give me the first bid!"

"Well, make et."

"Yes, but you have put up a sign."

"That don't matter; we ain't got no offers yet, an' yourn will be the first."

"Yes, but you will run it up on me, if you can, and I'll have to bid high or get froze out. It ain't hardly a fair deal."

"Don't see why."

"I put you in possession without a word."

"You hadn't a right to do anything else, and we treated fair on that deal."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Name et."

"I'll give you my highest bid at once, and you will not be likely to get a higher. I'll give you ten thousand dollars for the claim."

"Ten thousand, hey?"

"Yes. Not that I've got it in my pocket, but I'm bidding for some friends of mine, as I mentioned to you this morning. Now what do you say? I'll send for them right off, if you'll take it."

"That don't come up to the mark, neighbor."

"Not enough? Are you crazy?"

"I should hope not, but we are goin' to have a clean hundred thousand for that mine, or we don't sell."

"Ha! ha! ha! Why, man alive, you are as mad as a maniac. The property will never bring half of that, at its best, and it isn't half developed yet."

The possessor placed his finger on the side of his nose and slowly closed one eye.

"I don't p'tend ter know much about et," he said, "but I have got the word of my dead brother as ter what et's wu'th, and if we don't git our price we ar' goin' to keep it."

"Then you are likely to keep it forever and forever, and amen to it."

"Ef we keep et we kin work et, anyhow."

"At an expense."

"Ther mine will stand et, I reckon."

"Well, I'll send for these friends of mine, anyhow, and they can speak for themselves."

"All right, neighbor. I am here to sell, and if they want it right bad I opine we kin make a go of et, somehow, if they git up high enough ter reach us."

And that was the way the matter opened.

Later on the marshal was in the Primrose, when the landlord edged up to him and cornered him for a private chat.

"What d'ye think of them fellers?" he asked.

"What ones?"

"Wagner an' his gang."

"They are on the make, that's sure."

"Yas, and they claim to be hoosiers, don't they?"

"Yes, that's their hold. But, why? Don't you believe it?"

"Wal, when ye listen to 'em talkin' 'mongst themselves I never heard men talk more like Westerners, that's a dead hoss."

"I have noticed that they carry their guns as if they had been used to it for a time, and I don't reckon hoosiers have much use for things of that kind at home. Do you think they ain't right?"

"That is the p'int, marshal."

"Well, we'll have to see about that. Now that you mention et, there may be somethin' in et."

The city marshal was fairly well educated, yet at times even he dropped into the free and easy manner of speech endemic to the wild and woolly Southwest.

Night came on, and the seven desperadoes began to evince an inclination to "shoot up the town" and otherwise misbehave—for we have no intention of trying to conceal their true character from the reader.

They had been imbibing rather freely all the afternoon, and by night they were in a mood that meant mischief.

It was at about this stage of the game that the marshal ran up against their leader.

"I want a word with you alone, Mr. Wagner," he said.

"Have as many as ye want," was the response.

"We'll step aside here."

"No, we'll stay right whar we be, ef et's all the same to you."

"Just as you say; didn't want to give our business away to everybody, but it makes no difference to me."

"Then you have come to our price?"

"I have made up my mind that you are a fake, that you are not Wagner's brother at all."

"Wal, cuss your impudence, anyhow. Boys, d'ye hear what he is sayin' ter me? That he don't b'lieve we're what we lay claim to. By ther horn spoon, you had better take et back, Mister Man!"

Desert Dave had his hand on a gun, and his gang looked dangerous.

The marshal, however, did not appear to scare worth a nickel, and his own hand was at his hip.

"I take nothing back that I say in earnest," he defied. "I have my doubts about you fellows, and I am not afraid to tell you so. You claim to be from the East, but you don't look it."

"I know what's chewin' you," growled Desert Dave. "You want that mine for a song, and 'cause we won't sell out you are goin' to try to boost us out. But you had better drive slow, I tell ye. Ef ye don't there will be a muss hyer, and you will be in et."

"You may find it hard to sell your mine at any price."

"How's that?"

"If I raise a doubt about you, nobody will care to bite."

"What doubt kin ye raise? Didn't we come hyer with fair and square proof ter 'stablish our claim?"

"Well, yes, but there's more ways than one of getting hold of such proof and papers, and I won't undertake to say how you came by them. You are a man of the West, that I'll swear."

"Take et back, or by blank ef I don't bore ye!"

Quicker than a wink, had the desperado whipped out his gun, and he had the marshal at a disadvantage.

The Marshal of Quartz Corral had never seen a quicker draw in his life, and while not slow himself he found that this time he had been outdone at his own game. He removed his hand from his hip.

"Well, I take it back," he said, reading shoot in the man's eyes, "but you have shown the proof that you are a handy fellow with the gun, and such practice is generally gained here in the West. No doubt you have some time had experience here, the same as your brother."

"I have had enough to know how to take care of myself, you kin bet!" was the rejoinder. "And enough ter back up my claim to that mine, you kin rely. I don't talk shoot unless I mean biz, an' when I mean biz I generally begin by shootin' off my guns first and my mouth afterwards. If you don't believe it's so, ask my boys hyer an' see what they'll tell ye?"

"Well, put up your gun and take a drink at my expense. Come up, boys, and take a dose of poison."

"That's more like et."

The desperado returned his gun to the swinging holster that dangled at his thigh, but kept his eye on the marshal nevertheless.

It was not the marshal's plan to excite him further, however, for now he knew him for what he was, though he had not yet guessed that he was Desert Dave the terror of the plains.

The men stepped to the bar and drank the marshal's health and long life, and with a whoop for the town, left the room.

"You were right," said the marshal, turning to the landlord. "That fellow is a bad man, and I have got to take care of him. There is crooked work here, that I'm sure of."

CHAPTER XIV.

TRYING ON A LITTLE GAME.

THERE were other men besides the marshal who had their eyes upon these fellows.

In such a place at such a time, as has been

said and as is well known, were to be found men of every evil sort, from bad to very bad.

Every man was there to make a fortune, and to some it little mattered how it was made so long as it was secured—two of which stripe were Ham Gorman and Ben Scanley.

These were two of those who had jumped Peter Wagner's claim after he "petered out," and they had not given up the hope of yet possessing it. They had their eyes upon the seven desperadoes ever since their arrival in the camp.

Now the worst hole in Quartz Corral was the Whisky Straight.

This was a dive and gambling hell of the very worst type, and yet it was one of the most popular places in the camp, with the masses.

After leaving the hotel, Desert Dave and his men drifted toward this place and finally brought up inside, having imbibed several more drinks on the way, and they were now in trim for anything.

Gorman and Scanley had followed them, and thus entered a little later.

Some of Devil Dave's half dozen were dancing in the middle of the room, and the chief outlaw himself was looking on and laughing at their antics.

"They ar' lettin' theirselves loose a little," he said to those around. "Et is some time sence they hev been off ther farm, and they feel like young colts let out ter play."

And he laughed again.

He was still able to carry on the part he had undertaken, to the degree of his poor ability at best, and was keeping up the role. It was while he was thus engaged that Ham Gorman spoke to him.

"You are Mr. Wagner?" he asked.

"That's me, neighbor!" the reply.

"Then I would like to talk with you."

"All right; fire ahead, and I'll talk back at ye."

"Let's sit down here, and if you don't object we'll try a hand at cards while we chat. Mr. Scanley, this is Mr. Wagner, owner of the Jewel Mine."

Scanley put himself forward, upon this, and shook the desperado's hand warmly while he congratulated him upon his good fortune.

"It is about that very mine that we want to talk," said Gorman.

"Mebby you want to buy?"

"That's it."

"Well, et's fer sale, and I have had one offer of ten thousand dollars in cold cash."

"That isn't enough. It is worth more than that, Mr. Wagner. Now my partner and I have been talking this matter over, and we have decided to offer you thirteen thousand dollars."

"Et don't touch it, gentlemen."

"What? You hold it still higher than that?"

"Nothin' will buy it but one hundred thousand dollars spot."

Gorman and Scanley laughed heartily, at that, and Gorman shuffled the cards and dealt.

"There must be some mistake," he said.

"Have you got it into your head that you own the Territory, and that we want to buy it? I'm talking about the Jewel Mine."

"That's what I'm talkin' about, too. That's my figger on it. But, what are we going to play?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," cried Gorman.

He dashed down the cards.

"What's that?"

"I'll play you for the mine—that is, if my friend here is willing."

"Just as you say," agreed Scanley.

"How much will you put up against it?" asked the desperado, eagerly. "And what will the game be? and how played?"

Gorman and Scanley consulted for a moment.

"We'll put up fifty thousand dollars," then declared Gorman, "and play it against the mine. Four-hand eucher, myself and pard against you and any man you want to pick. Two out of three."

"I'll do it! Rye and Rock, come here!"

"What's wanted?" asked one of the desperado's men, slouching forward.

The situation was explained to him, and the fellow with the remarkable appellation sat down.

Gorman and Scanley made up a check, which both signed, and the supposed Wagner laying down the deed for the mine, the check was laid on top of it and the game commenced.

Their earnest talk had drawn attention to them, and before the first game ended they were the center of attraction of the whole room.

That game was won by the desperadoes.

The next was begun at once, after a drink, and this time it seemed to be going in favor of the brace of capitalists.

Suddenly, with an oath, Desert Dave leaped to his feet, his gun in hand and a shot fired in the same moment, and Ham Gorman rolled to the floor, shot through the heart.

"That's the way I pay cheatin'!" cried the desperado, sharply.

His partner, Rye and Rock, had jerked out his gun too, but he was too slow about it, for, a second after Gorman was hit, a bullet from Scanley's direction struck him and toppled him over, and Scanley and Desert Dave glared at each other, knowing it was their turn now.

There was no delay; both fired, and Scanley was the man to get the pill.

He dropped to the floor, badly wounded, and Desert Dave made a dash for the door, calling to his men as he did so.

They were now only six, and some of these were too drunk to shoot straight, but they sprung into a bunch as quickly as possible and blazed away at the crowd as they pushed to the door.

Several men went down, many were hit more or less hard, and the room was in an uproar.

They were nearly to the door when their way was suddenly blocked by some men of grim appearance, the leader of whom shouted:

"Stop these fellows, for it is Desert Dave and his Devils!"

Nothing could have created greater consternation, for the very name carried terror with it.

Men fell back in every direction, many leaping through the windows and others hiding under tables, and in about ten seconds the new-comers were left to face the desperadoes alone.

There would have been a bloody fray, but for the fact that the outlaws had already emptied their weapons.

On the other hand, the new-comers seemed anxious to take them alive.

And this they seemed likely to do, at first.

With a cry from Desert Dave, however, the desperadoes rallied and leaped upon their foes.

There was a sharp struggle, but it was a brief one, for it terminated in a manner that was not looked for, with an accident that would not have been thought of.

The shock of their meeting, part of them crashing against the end of the flimsy building, carried out some of the boards, and the men tumbled out upon the still more flimsy stoop.

This broke down with them, and the attackers being in the most misfortunate situation, they were the ones to fill the hole.

With yells the six desperadoes bounded over them and were off.

But it could not be that they were destined to escape, for now upon the scene came the city marshal with a force of men.

He had seen enough of these fellows to have his suspicions fully awakened, had quietly gotten together a body of men to capture them, and had come to the Whisky Straight for that purpose.

The men who had leaped from the windows of the bard den, however, and who had run to the scene from other places, were so thick around that it was dangerous to fire a shot, and in the few seconds of uncertainty the ruffians succeeded in disappearing.

"Those men must not escape!" cried one of the victims of the accident.

"A hundred dollars for every one of them that is taken!" shouted another, as they scrambled up out of the wrecked stoop.

"Who are you?" demanded the city marshal.

"I'm Arizona Dick, with Sheriff Owens and a posse, after Devil Dave and his Desperado Half Dozen!"

"We'll have them or die!" cried Enoch Wagner. "We have not followed them so far to be cheated of our prey now."

"You are right," agreed Tom Stannard.

"After them, one and all, for they cannot escape us! This is the way they went, and they haven't had time to get their horses!"

CHAPTER XV.

UPON THE DEATH-TRAIL.

At the mention of horses, the city marshal uttered a shout.

"To the stables!" he cried. "That's where they have headed for, to get out their cayuses!"

"Lead the way!" cried Dick. "They are ours; we have been on the trail for days and days, knowing they certainly would come here in a short time. Do not shoot to kill."

"That be durn!" shouted the enraged marshal. "They are our game as well as yours, and we'll take no chances. Let every shot tell."

They were running as they exchanged these words.

Wagner and Stannard had taken the right course, and the marshal, Arizona Dick, and the sheriff, were right after them.

The stables were in the rear of the Primrose, rude structures, and as the mob ran up some horses were just being led out and fire was opened upon them without a question.

The horses reared and plunged, one got away, and another dropped to the ground where it stood.

The men dodged back into the stables and the door closed after them.

"Burn them out!" was the cry.

"No! no!" from others. "They ain't worth the hosses and stuff that would burn with 'em."

"But, we must have them!"

"Dead or alive!"

A rattling volley was fired, and bullets went ping into the wood of the stables by the dozen.

In a few minutes the fire was returned, the outlaws having had time to load up their guns, and every shot brought down a man, a fact that caused the crowd to make a break for cover.

"Can they get out the rear way?" asked Dick.

"No, unless they break out, for there is no door."

"We'll put men there, anyhow. What we want here is order."

"You are Arizona Dick?"

"Yes."

"Then take command, and we'll be guided by you," spoke the marshal. "I have heard of you and know what you are made of."

"Yes," echoed the sheriff, "take command, Dick, and we'll manage it in the right way. We'll capture them first, and then make our explanation afterwards. We desire to get them alive."

Another volley from the barn, and two men out of that very group went down, and some others fled to cover.

There was a young moon in the sky, so it was not dark.

The fire was returned, and in a few moments more there was the sound of a crash behind the rude structures.

This was followed by a yell, and across an open space beyond dashed the six desperadoes, mounted, firing their weapons to frighten the attackers from immediate pursuit.

Something of this kind had been thought of and prepared for on the part of Arizona Dick and the sheriff.

They had left two men in charge of their horses.

On entering the Whisky Straight, these two men had remained within call, and when Dick and the others ran toward the stables the horses were quickly led in the same direction.

Dick sounded the signal for the horses to be brought.

They were at hand immediately, and the men vaulted into the saddles, Dick lending aid to Tom Stannard before mounting himself.

Stannard, it will be remembered, had a broken arm, and that arm was carried in a sling, which placed him at a disadvantage. But, that in no wise kept him from doing his part.

"After them!" cried Dick, fiercely. "They shall not escape us now, I swear it!" Arizona Dick was desperate.

Not only had he a just cause for vengeance himself, but was aroused against the desperadoes for the hellish work they had done.

"Yes, after them!" echoed the sheriff. "They shall be ours, if we have to scour the deserts to gather them up. But, they cannot get away now; we have Apache John, the best trailer in Arizona!"

The crowd gave a shout.

Away the pursuers dashed, and as they went Dick called for Apache John to take his place at the head.

The city marshal of Quartz Corral did not remain idle, either, but gave the word for men to get their horses in all haste, and ere long another posse started out on the trail of the first.

These were exciting times for Quartz Corral, live camp as it was.

A visit from Desert Dave and his band meant something, and as soon as the first scare was over every man jack of them brought out his extra gun and wanted to go on the war-path forthwith.

Only the mounted could go, however, but these made up a party of not a man less than a hundred, by the time the last had dashed off, and it would be next to a miracle if Desert Dave and his band could escape.

Meantime the dead had been gathered up, the wounded taken care of, and Quartz Corral had here another sensation.

The desperado, Rye-and-Rock, whom Scanley had shot before meeting his own fate, was found pierced through the heart.

On the table still lay the deed to the mine, with the check for which the players had been contending, and the paper was put into proper hands, to be held until rightfully claimed.

Desert Dave made straight for the hills, that range beyond which lay the barren wastes.

Once let him reach the deserts, and he believed he could make good his escape, no matter how numerous were his foes, for he knew nearly every foot of the death valleys.

But, desperate foes were upon his track now, men who would never give up until he had paid the penalty for his crimes with his life.

And the most desperate of these, if it was

possible that such a distinction could be made, was Arizona Dick, the Detective.

Never before, perhaps, had the tiger of his nature been so thoroughly roused.

He remembered the fate to which he had been consigned, he still felt the horror of those days of imprisonment, and fresher in mind than these were the frightful deeds of the deserts.

The very air and the ground itself seemed to cry out for vengeance, and that imagined cry rung in his ears constantly.

There happened to be but the one trail out of Quartz Corral, leading to the east, and the nature of the ground was such that this one trail had to be followed for some distance.

As Dick and his band entered it they saw the desperado ahead, and some shots were fired back in the direction of the pursuers.

These were answered in like manner.

And so the race of life or death was begun, under the young moon and the bright, twinkling stars.

The outlaws had an advantage.

Their horses were fresh from the stables, while those of the pursuers had been used.

Dick, the sheriff, and the others had just arrived in the town and had at once made their attack upon the Desert Devil, determined to waste no time in performing that business.

So, under these circumstances, it was but natural that the desperadoes should gain ground, and that the pursuers should finally lose sight of them.

When the top of the range was reached, they had disappeared.

The pursuers had made sure that they had not doubled upon the trail, by deploying wherever that trick could have been played.

Then, too, they had Apache John for their guide, and now and again he had given the assurance that they were still upon the right track, and so they had pushed on and on.

But now all trail seemed to end.

It was only in seeming, though, for leaping out of the saddle the expert man of the plains quickly picked it up again.

It was slow work following it down to the sands below, but it was nevertheless done in haste withal, and there it was taken up and they pressed forward, and once again the deserts were to witness dark work.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AMBUSH.—RUN TO EARTH.

THE outlaws were out of sight, as said.

As it had been impossible for them to disappear by other than natural means, however, there was their trail.

Having this to guide them, the pursuers, determined as they were, felt no doubt of their ability to overtake them eventually, and then would come the struggle to the death.

Their supply of water was not great, but knowing that they could venture as far without it as the desperadoes, they did not stop for that.

It was likely that Desert Dave would head for a spring somewhere.

And this, Apache John soon declared, he was doing.

While they had the light of the moon to guide them, they could pursue at a fair gait, but with the disappearance of the moon they were handicapped.

The stars gave light, and they could still follow the trail, and did, but it was only at a walk, and with Apache John ahead on foot to determine the way and to make sure that the desperadoes had not scattered.

In this manner they proceeded for hours.

And behind them came the city marshal of Quartz Corral and his men, having a broader and easier trail to follow.

"I know whar they ar' headin' fer, now," finally declared Apache John.

"And where is that?" demanded Sheriff Owens.

"Bitter Springs."

"Still on the desert?" asked Dick.

"In about the worst part of it," the old trailer declared. "We'll git thar about daylight, at this pace."

"I begin to fear they will give us the slip," the sheriff remarked.

"Why?"

"They have been making speed while we have been obliged to creep, and we will reach the spring played out while they will have rested and will be gone."

"Thar's somethin' in that, an' that ain't ther worst I fear, either, by a long sight. But no use borrowin' trouble; time enough to tackle it when it looms up on ther horizon."

"What worse do you dread?" asked Dick.

"Never mind, boyee; no use puttin' ye down in ther mouth."

"Well, I think I guess it, but that does not deter me from pushing on and taking the risk. I am desperate."

"Thar's one conserlashun, they can't hide their trail from us, do what they will, and sooner or later we're bound to round 'em up. Et's a death-hunt this time, by the 'tar-nel!"

From that time they pushed on in grim silence, guided by the Apache trailer, and at last they came to the pools known as Bitter Springs.

It was just growing light, and their horses were tired out.

"Jest as I feared," cried the guide, as soon as he came close to the place.

"The water has been spoiled?" demanded Dick. "That was what I was afraid of."

"If that is the case, we shall have all we want to do to get back to the hills again before we die of thirst," said the sheriff. "We have run too great a risk, I am afraid."

"Ther spring has been filled in, that's all," said Apache John.

"That's all?" repeated Don McKenzie. "How much worse could it be?"

"Well, et would be a heap worse, ef they had had power to dry et up, but as et is we kin dig et out again."

They had now gathered around the basin. It had been filled full with sand and stones, and the game of the desperadoes was understood.

The horses, smelling the water, made efforts to get into the spot where the spring lay, but were restrained, and the work of digging out the pool was immediately begun.

While they were thus engaged, the city marshal and his men arrived.

Arizona Dick called him aside as soon as greetings had been exchanged, and said:

"Marshal, you have got to reduce force immediately, sending back every man that can be spared. I am the head of this chase, you must acknowledge."

"Explain."

"Well, the springs, even at their best, could never supply water enough for so many, and we are likely to find the next one filled, the same as this. That will mean a hundred dead men on the sands."

"But, we have quite a supply of water yet."

"So much the better for my plan. You must give us every drop that can be spared and the men get back in safety, and we will press right on. Then, you must send out another party with as big a supply as can be carried. The outlaws are only six, and we do not need more than a dozen good men to take them."

"I have already sent back a party to come on with two iron wagons with tanks full."

"Excellent; but this force must be reduced."

And so it was carried out.

The whole band, save twenty all told, was turned back, and the rest pushed straight on.

They now had all the water they could carry, the best horses that could be picked out of the number, and everything was in their favor. Providence, it seemed, favored them.

Without a stop they pressed forward, not with speed but with constant going, and early in the afternoon they came to another spring.

This, too, had been filled in, as badly as the first.

From this point the desperadoes must have felt that they were secure from further pursuit.

They did not reckon upon the determination of the men who were after them, nor figure in the possibilities of their having a supply of water sufficient to carry them through.

"We have got them now, if we kin hold out," declared Apache John.

"How is that?" asked Dick.

"Thar ain't another drop o' water, to my knowin', within twenty hours' from this hyer spring."

"And they can't make it without a stop, eh?"

"That is et, boyee. They have taken a supply from hyer, and we'll find 'em restin' in ther lava bed hills ye kin jest see over that way," indicating.

"Then that spot will mark their capture," grimly.

They still pushed on, and by night they were in the lava beds, almost played out by the heat of the burning sun.

Their determination had kept them up, however, having water for their needs but which they had to use sparingly, not knowing when they would get another supply of the precious stuff.

They had clung to the trail, which had not once divided, and which they still followed as they entered the lava beds.

Suddenly several rifles rung out close at hand.

Five men toppled off their horses in the same moment, almost, and dropped to rise no more.

The others leaped from their saddles instantly, just as the rifles spoke again, and this time only two were hit, and they not fatally. They had walked into an ambush!

"Fools that we didn't think of it!" cried the Marshal of Quartz Corral.

It took them but a moment to get under cover, and at once Dick took in the situation.

"It's too late to mourn about a mistake," he said. "All we have got to do is to surround them, and they are ours. The nature of the place favors us, men, and we cannot fail."

This was true; the outlaws were in a depression on the summit of a slight elevation.

All around were ragged portions of rock and lava, and a hundred hiding-places were presented.

Dick directed his men, one after another, and within a few minutes the central lava bed was surrounded and all escape for the desperadoes was cut off completely.

Still, Desert Dave was a desperate man, and he might fool them unless they were fully alert every moment.

And it was not a one-sided arrangement, by any means.

It the outlaws could not get out, neither could the besiegers expose themselves without the risk of a bullet in the brain; and so the matter rested.

It was merely a question of which could hold out the longer, and that being the case the doom of the desperadoes was sealed. The besiegers could expect help and supplies, sooner or later, but for the besieged there could be no help.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOUR OF VENGEANCE. THE ENDING.

The attacking party had but one object in view.

And that object was, the taking of the desperadoes alive, if possible. For, so heinous had been their crimes, that to shoot them would be too merciful.

Even Sheriff Owens and the Marshal of Quartz Corral were thoroughly aroused, since the terrible fire from the ambush into which they had run, which had cut down close friends of each.

So, the besiegers merely waited.

Not a word was heard from the besieged, and when called out to they would not respond.

Their game was understood, however, and they were not given the chance to pick off one of their hidden enemies, for not one of them exposed himself to their aim.

The moon rode a little higher in the heavens than on the previous night, but finally it dipped below the distant outline of hills and only the starlight remained to illumine the rugged scene at the lava beds.

Every man of the besiegers was alert, with no thought of giving up or of giving way to sleep.

Silence reigned supreme, save now and again when some one moved.

Finally this silence was most rudely broken, and in a moment's time all was excitement the greatest.

There was a yell, a scramble of hoofs, immediately a volley of shots, and out of their hiding-place, mounted, dashed the desperadoes, firing as they came and all loudly screaming.

The besiegers were surprised, of course; and, almost before they could recover, the intended damage had been done and everything was to the advantage of the desperadoes.

Coming out of their place of shelter, firing and yelling as described, they swerved to the left, and shooting down the man who stood guard over the horses of the besiegers, stampeded the animals.

As said, it was done before Arizona and his men could recover, though only a few brief seconds elapsed.

"Fire!" cried Arizona Dick. "Fire!"

And he took action himself even as he gave the command, and one of the horses dropped, followed immediately by another.

One of these was the horse of Devil Dave himself, but the outlaw chief was as quickly upon the back of another, and for a moment it looked as if he must get away.

But, that appearance was soon changed, when Apache John, Sheriff Owens, and the others fired as deliberately as at galloping buffalo.

One after another the horses went down, and, ere the most fortunate of the six devils could get out of range he had been thrown to the ground by the falling of the animal he straddled.

"At them!" cried Arizona Dick.

And he was the first to take the risk of what he ordered.

"At them! They must not escape, and we must have them, alive if possible but dead if necessary!"

Leaping this way and that, in a zigzag, he was going for Devil Dave, who, with his men, was making off at his best speed, seeking other cover, and who turned and fired.

His bullets went wild, however.

The others were quick to follow Dick's desperate lead.

In fact, it had needed not his call to arouse them, for they were almost as alert as he.

At the desperadoes they sprung, from every side, and then began a battle that could have but one termination, owing to the advantage of numbers.

Two of Arizona Dick's men were struck, but the firing that was done from their side

was not with the intention of killing, though some wounds were inflicted.

Finally the desert desperadoes were overpowered and taken.

At the last moment Desert Dave tried to take his own life, but he was prevented from doing that.

"Now you are mine, you fiend!" hissed Dick, his captor.

"And who are you?" was the sullen demand, as the desperado stared at him.

"I am Arizona Dick, whom you thought you had sent to his doom."

The hardened ruffian could not repress a start, and he looked at the faces of the others around.

"And I am Tom Stannard, you monster!" cried Stannard, shaking his fist in the outlaw's face. "The time of vengeance is at hand."

"And I, curse you," cried Enoch Wagner, "am the only one who escaped from the emigrant party whom you massacred on the desert. The blood of your victims is crying aloud for vengeance!"

"Well, et's all up, Lizard Luke, I guess," remarked the desperado, with forced calmness.

"Yas, an' all through your cussedness!" was the growled retort. "Ef you had sold out that mine for the ten thousand when it was offered, and lighted out, we would hev come off all right."

"Well, we didn't, and so we have come off all wrong, it seems. But, we won't show the white feather; let's die as we have lived, boys, mighty hard."

"You bet!"

"Stand us up and peg away at us, Arizona Dick, seein' that you have got the drop on us."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Tom Stannard and Enoch Wagner together. "As if he can show you such mercy as that, after what you have done, you inhuman brutes!"

"Well, what then?"

"You shall see, curse you!"

Both these men spat upon the object of their hatred, and not another man of the party said them nay.

The arms of the six had been thoroughly bound, while this was going on, and now Arizona and his friends set about burying their dead comrades and making ready for the return across the sands.

Having no horses, every animal being disabled, they did not dare to postpone their return an hour longer than absolutely necessary.

When they had buried their dead, having also ended the sufferings of their wounded horses, they set forth.

No one asked what was going to be done with the prisoners; every man seemed to know that instinctively. They proceeded in silence, slowly, steadily, hour after hour, the prisoners compelled to walk with their hands tied.

The rising sun found them still in motion, and they made almost no stop whatever, but pressed on and still on, and yet on, and on. They had some water, but had to be sparing of it, and of this their prisoners got none. The sun rose higher and higher, and they began to walk with labored effort.

On and on, heavily, wearily, mile after mile, until it seemed as if they must fall to the ground and remain there, and finally one of the prisoners did drop.

"Give me water!" he cried. "Give me water, or end my suffering with a bullet at once!"

"Yes, end it here," said Devil Dave. "Whatever you are going to do, do it now. I don't ask for my life, I know you will take that, but I do ask you to take it at once."

There was a grim silence.

Perhaps the same thought was in the mind of every one, and no one spoke for some time, and finally Arizona Dick was the first one to do so.

"Who of us all has greatest cause for hatred against these devils?" he asked. "You, Apache John, and you, Sheriff Owens, and I, have just cause against them; but, is ours to be compared with that of these cousins?"

With a wave of the hand he indicated Enoch Wagner and Tom Stannard.

"Will it not satisfy our vengeance sufficiently, to leave the desperadoes in their hands? Come, let us go on!"

Dick started; after some seconds the Marshal of Quartz Corral followed, and finally Sheriff Owens and the others, save the two mentioned, and not a man of them had a desire to look back.

As soon as they had gone, Tom Stannard drew his knife and severed the bonds that held Devil Dave's wrists.

"Now, curse you, defend yourself!" he cried. "I have but one arm, you have two, but I fear you not. Here, take this knife, and you will go down or I will?"

"Are you mad?" cried Wagner.

But, he was too late, for already it had been done, and Devil Dave, armed with a knife, stood like a tiger at bay, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible.

For a moment he glanced at his foe, then sprung.

Stannard was looking for it, and bravely met the attack, and for a few seconds there was a fierce and furious struggle.

Dave's men showed an inclination to spring in to his aid, even though their hands were bound, but Enoch Wagner held them back at the pistol's point, while he watched the fight fearfully.

Presently, with a moan, the desperado sunk down, wounded, and as he fell he muttered:

"You have won; finish the work!"

But, that Tom Stannard did not do; he left him lying where he had fallen, to die finally under the burning desert sun.

While the others— But, we draw the curtain. When the cousins overtook the others no questions were asked, but all pushed on in the same grim silence, hour after hour; on, and yet on, and on, until finally, as the sun dipped, they came to the second of the destroyed springs.

Here they threw themselves on the ground, and there, on the following morning, the rescue party, with water in abundance, found them.

They had accomplished their vengeful mission.

Quartz Corral was reached, and when Enoch Wagner had disposed of his mine, he and Tom Stannard disappeared forever from that part of the country. Arizona Dick and Apache John, meantime, had set out for Yuma to report the success of their Devil-hunt.

Perhaps they did not render their report quite in full, but it was sufficiently near the facts to satisfy the man who had employed them for the service. Everybody commended them for their work, and every citizen drew a fresh breath once again, knowing that the noted desperado, Devil Dave, would haunt the trails no more.

THE END.

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